SHOOTING FOR THE SKY, 4 | HEALTH & WELLNESS, 27 | TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE, 36

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*See story on page 20*

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# glastonbury LIFE

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## QUOTE OF NOTE:

"My first question to them was: 'Where do we find the Milky Way?' They said, 'Just wait and see. All you need to do is look up when the sun sets.'" - *Stephen Ippolito*

**See story page 4**

## ON THE COVER

**Derek Conti is flying high at Mt. Snow's prestigious snowboarding academy.**

**Photo by Brian Ambrose**
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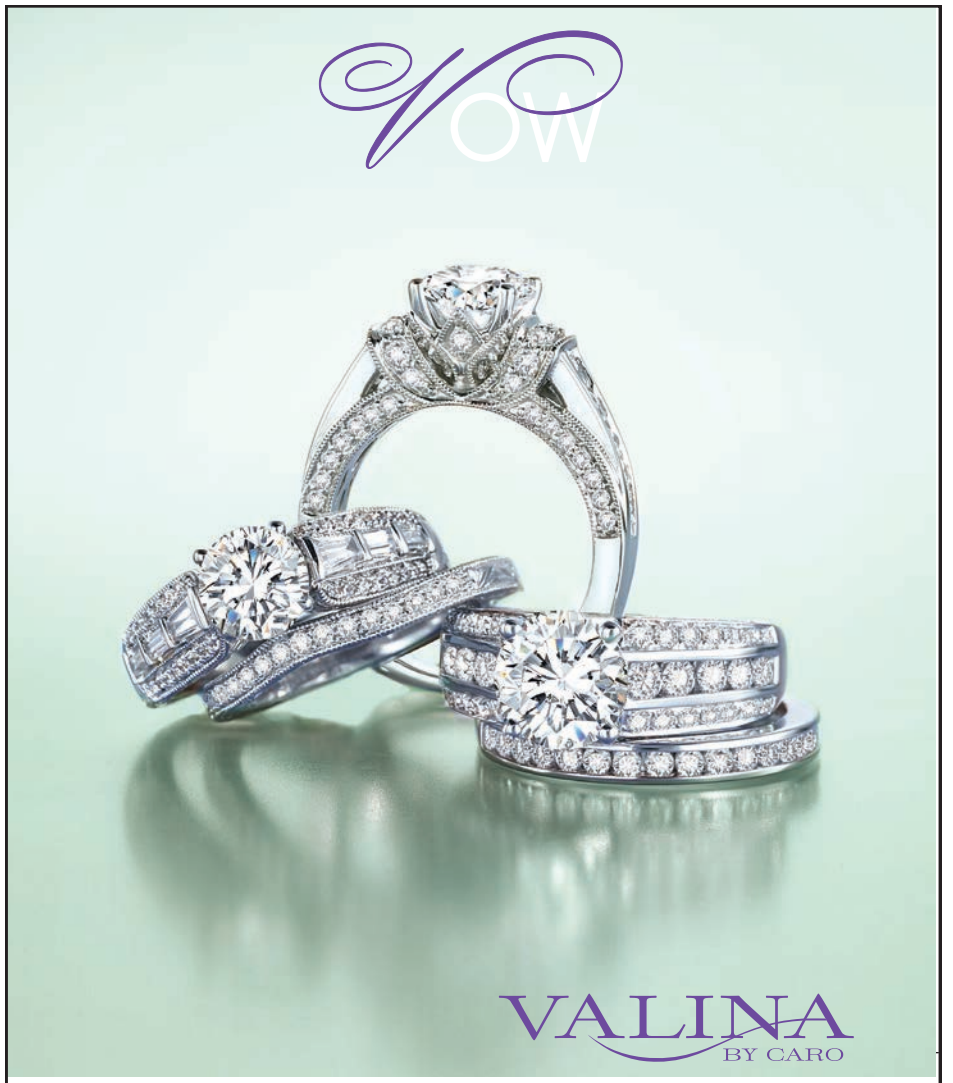


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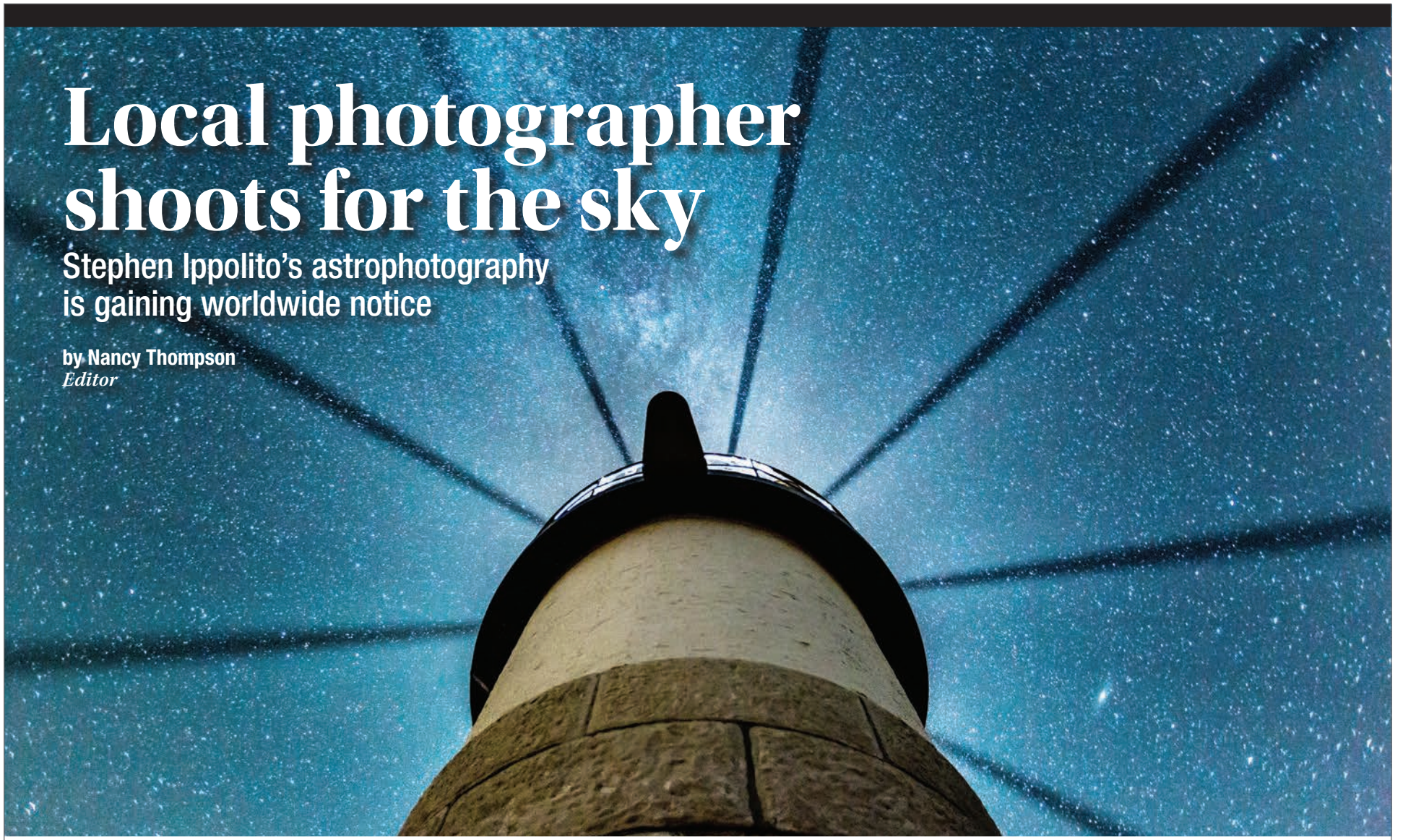
# Local photographer shoots for the sky

## Stephen Ippolito's astrophotography is gaining worldwide notice

by Nancy Thompson
*Editor*



This photo above of Marshall Point Lighthouse in Maine was featured on a recent home page of bing.com. Fans of "Forrest Gump" might recognize the lighthouse as the spot where Gump turned around on his cross-country run.

Stephen Ippolito bought his first digital camera, a simple point-and-shoot model, in 2002. He didn't upgrade to a professional-quality camera until a few years ago. Today his photos are being published and receiving acclaim here and abroad.

It's been a quick trip to fame for the local man, who honed his skills by taking photos of his children and their sporting events.

"My grandfather was very big into photography," he said. "My interest really started from him."

Ippolito grew up in New Jersey, where he played soccer and electric guitar as a youth.

He met his wife, JoAnn, on a blind date and studied accounting at Rider College, now Rider University.

He works at UTC Climate Controls & Security in Farmington.

He said he's always liked having the latest gadgets, including an 8 millimeter movie camera and a Polaroid camera when he was younger.

"I never really got heavily into photography until my kids were born," he said of his twins, Stephen and Elena. He took family photos and used a small flip-style video camera to record his son's Cub Scout activities. "I went to every event and would show a recap of the year to the parents. There were funny video snippets, and the parents enjoyed it." Their reaction encouraged him to get more involved in photography.

"A few years ago I realized the kids were getting older and decided to invest in a digital SLR. I wanted a better camera," he said.

He started buying photography magazines and saw pictures of the night sky with the Milky Way, which usually is obscured by lights in urban and suburban areas.

"I was fascinated with the Milky Way," he said. "I'd never seen it."

Two years ago he went to California for a family vacation. A photographer that his wife knew offered to take him to Joshua Tree National Park in southeastern California to take photographs of the night sky. There, they met a second photographer.

"My first question to them was: 'Where do we find the Milky Way?'" he said. "They said, 'Just wait and see. All you need to do is look up when the sun sets.'"

They arrived at the park early and decided to take some photos at sunset at a grove of cholla cacti. When they got there, Ippolito had what he called "a misadventure with cactus spines" that left him with several painful spines in his hands and caused them to miss the sunset. The spines were removed, darkness fell, and Ippolito's life was changed.

Stephen Ippolito photos

Stephen Ippolito is earning worldwide acclaim for his photographs.

Stephen Ippolito photos

**The photo above of the Saville Dam in Barkhamsted is one of Stephen Ippolito's local landscapes.**

**Stephen Ippolito took the photo on the right of a seal on a beach in Maine with the Milky Way in the sky while on vacation with his family.**

"I was amazed when it was dark," he said. "I'd never seen anything like it in my life. He took photos of Arch Rock with the Milky Way behind it, and emailed the image to space.com, which carried a story about it. The photo and story also were picked up by Yahoo news, and the image was a runner-up in a contest sponsored by The Photo Society.

"I became even more infatuated with night sky photography," he said.

He took a private workshop during a family vacation to Maine

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last year and took several stunning photographs of scenes with the Milky Way there, including one that has been featured in photography magazines and by news outlets here and in the Royal Mail, one of the leading publications in England.

Ippolito was at Sand Beach, planning to take photos of the beach and the Milky Way. Suddenly a seal clambered out of the water and onto the beach. He had never seen a seal and wasn't sure how close he should be. Then he realized he might be able to get a picture of the seal and the Milky Way. He shined a light on the seal and took several long exposures. The image is so surreal that Ippolito's son was convinced that it was fake.

He has continued to take photos of the night sky and other subjects and to be recognized by a variety of organizations.

Ippolito's photo of the Marshall Point Lighthouse in Maine was the homepage for bing.com, Microsoft's search engine, and space.com published what they called a "stunning skywatcher image" of the Milky Way from Bell Rock in Sedona, Arizona during a thunderstorm. "The Magical Tree," an image from Moab Utah, won Popular Photography's Mentor Series Travel Photo contest.

An image of a cow looking at the camera with the Milky Way in the background also has gotten a lot of attention.

Ippolito was in New Hampshire near a fenced-in field at night, planning to shoot the Milky Way. Suddenly he heard what sounded like a stampede. "I jumped so high," he said. "I thought it was a moose. I had never seen cows run before." He looked and saw about a half dozen

**Stephen Ippolito calls this image of a cow under the Milky Way "Got Milk(yway)."**

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cows staring at him from the other side of the fence.

He shined a flashlight on one of them and took some photos, then layered it with a picture of the Milky Way in the sky above. The final image, which Ippolito titled "Got Milk(yway)," was featured on CBSnews.com with the headline "Moove Over, Milky Way." The blurb refers to the shot as an "epic picture."

A different image of the Marshall Point Lighthouse with the Milky Way was a winner in a photo contest sponsored by FOTOdigital magazine, which ran it on its cover and published part of Ippolito's night sky portfolio and his personal story about discovering the beauty of the Milky Way.

"This image could be my top favorite, and it still is one image that fits into the things I like to see and would probably – try to – do," editor Jose Antunes said about the photo. "This said, this is another magic moment ... with the curve of the Milky Way following the shape of the lighthouse light. Every element fits to create a unique view. ... The more I look at it the more it looks as something from a book about a fantastic story, a starting point for an exciting adventure."

In addition to shooting the night sky, Ippolito enjoys many other kinds of photography, including birds, especially eagles and osprey along the Connecticut River, landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes and people.

His images are available for sale through his website, stephenippolitophoto.com.

"I'd never done photography as anything but a hobby but have always enjoyed it," he said. **GL**

Stephen Ippolito photos

**Stephen Ippolito took this photo while vacationing at Acadia National Park in Maine.**


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# Lou Romeo's 35 years in the grocery business

## Started his career as a part-time stock boy

by Mara Dresner
*Staff Writer*

Lou Romeo started in the grocery business as a high school student. His West Side Marketplace in Rocky Hill has been in business for 35 years.

When Lou Romeo was in high school in Waterbury, he needed a part-time job. He found one at Fulton Market, a small chain with stores throughout Naugatuck Valley.

"I was a stock clerk, whatever they wanted me to do," he said. "I've been in the grocery business all my life."

After graduation, he went to work at Fulton Market full time as a meat cutter, then moved to Stop & Shop, where he was a meat manager for 10 years. He followed that with a move to upstate New York, where he worked as a meat supervisor at another small chain.

"All I knew was retail," Romeo said. "Then I went to wholesale."

He joined Bozzuto's Inc., a wholesale distributor based in Cheshire, as a meat buyer.

"I was purchasing meat for all the stores," he said. "They were a small operation at the time; we're going back

40 years. I enjoyed the wholesale business, the pressure as a buyer. I got to meet a lot of people."

After leaving Bozzuto's, he worked for Allied Grocers, a wholesaler that supplied a couple of hundred stores. He spent about five years with them when he decided the time was right to have his own store.

"The goal was always to be in my own business," said Romeo, who opened West Side Marketplace in Rocky Hill 35 years ago.

He's seen the town change through the years.

"This part of town, the west part of town? All we had was Century Hills, and just the apartments. Then, that area started growing," Romeo said. "It was a nice location in a great little town. I purchased a small store; 5,000 square feet, Cold Spring Plaza was next door. It was very small."

Romeo put his background to good use as he developed the fledging store.

"My background was always in the meat end of the grocery business," he said. "Because my background was in the meat business, we grew our business with meat. We had a good reputation with deli, with prepared foods. We couldn't compete with groceries because there wasn't much groceries there [in the store]."

As they grew, West Side Marketplace added on to the store, first growing to 9,000 square feet, then expanding to 12,000 square feet.

"Then, we were maxed out. It reached a point at the old store where we couldn't grow anymore. We couldn't even get deliveries out at the back door," Romeo remembered.

**"People are eating healthier. Our produce business has picked up drastically."**

**–Lou Romeo**

While they considered limiting themselves to perishable foods only, a nearby property became available and they purchased it and guilt their current 28,000 square foot facility.

"At that point, Big Y had just opened a store; Food Mart was in the town and had just remodeled their store," Romeo said. "It's worked out, it's worked out."

At first Romeo commuted from Waterbury. He moved to Glastonbury about 32 years ago.

"We had some friends who lived in Glastonbury. I wanted to be a little closer to work and just fell in love with Glastonbury," Romeo said. "I like the fact we're in the country. South Glastonbury is just absolutely gorgeous. It's close to everything; it's right on the river. It's been a great experience."

Romeo said the landscape of the grocery industry has changed through the decades.

"Competition is fierce. There was no Stew Leonard's. There was no Costco; there was no store like that. Walmart wasn't huge in the grocery business," he said. "When we purchased this store, we knew our background; always perishables, quality produce, deli, meats, this is where we concentrated on."

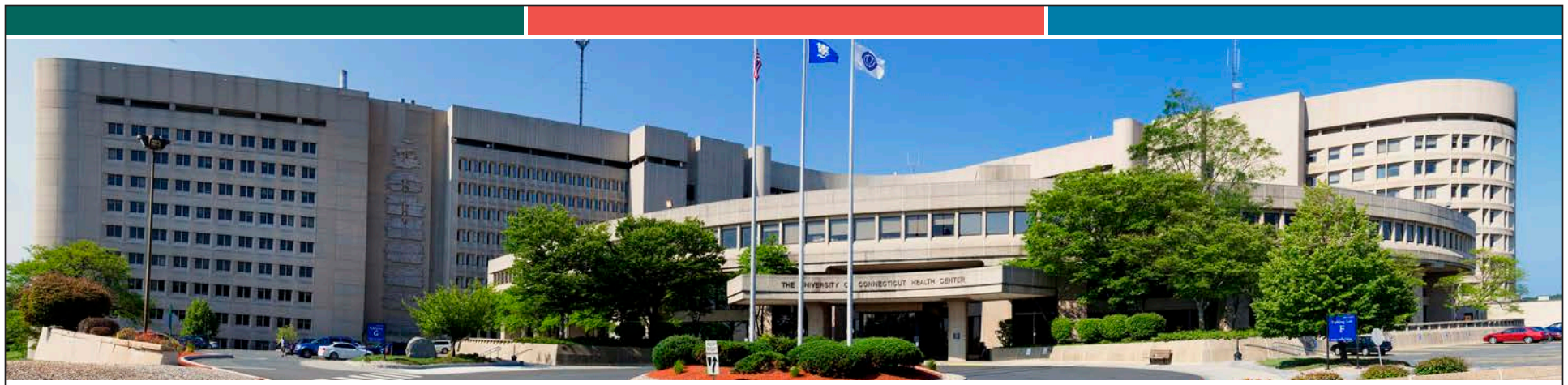
West Side offers catering, grab-and-go options for lunch and dinner, pizza, sandwiches, prepared foods, an olive bar and a salad bar.

"I'm surprised by the amount of foods that people buy that are grab-and-go dinners, the prepared foods we sell," said Romeo, who is semi-retired and whose son-in-law Chris Romeo runs the business. "Years and years ago, people would just come and they bought meat. Little by little, we began introducing prepared food they could take home and cook. Now, we offer food that's all prepared. I think we were ahead of the curve in offering prepared foods for our customers to take home and cook. Stuffed chicken breasts, stuffed filet of sole. I don't remember anybody else doing that.

"People are eating healthier. Our produce business has picked up drastically," he added.

He's been surprised by other food trends.

"Nobody bought chicken wings. We used to throw them out, for crying out loud. Now they cost more. Once the restaurants pick up on something,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people start buying. They look at recipes. That really drives the price," he noted. "The big trend now is barbecue stuff, briskets of beef, corned beef."

He's also had to expand his hours to compete with the other stores in the area.

"When we first opened, we were closed on Sundays. Then we started opening Sundays on a limited basis, 8 to 2. Now what's really surprising is that Sunday is the busiest day of the week and it is for everybody. It's just that there's no letup anymore, even holidays," he said. "If people are going to shop, we're going to be open. I'd like to close on all holidays, to be honest with you."

West Side is only closed on Christmas and Easter.

Another big change has come in the way people pay for their groceries.

"When they first started using credit cards, I said, 'People aren't going to use credit cards to go grocery shopping.' Now all they use is credit cards and debit cards," said Romeo, noting most people use debit cards.

"It's just a different world now. Things have changed," he said.

"I have known Lou for almost 30 years. Bozzuto's has done business with Lou and his family for closer to 40 years," said George Motel, executive vice president, at Bozzuto's. "I have had the opportunity to watch him grow his company from a small market sandwiched inside a plaza into the full-service, free-standing market it is today ... Contributing to West Side's success was Lou's vision to provide the highest quality of food products while providing personalized service specific to the communities they serve. Lou is genuinely a great guy. To meet him for the first time leaves you with a feeling you have known him his whole life. Lou and his wife Brenda are genuinely nice people. They remain rooted in their communities and always make the time for anyone they engage."

Part of that involvement includes donating food to hunger relief groups and supporting a variety of local organizations.

"We've always worked with the town," Romeo said. "We donate a lot to the food bank. Being in the food business, it breaks my heart to think there are people who are in need of food, especially children."

Romeo has won several awards, including Business Person of the Year and has been inducted into the Connecticut Food Association's Hall of Fame and named an IGA Retailer of the Year.

Romeo said personal relationships have been one of the best parts of his 35 years of owning the market.

"There have been so many nice kids going through the store. Now, they're married; they have their own children. We've had a good time. We met a lot of people. We made a lot of friends; it's been great," he said.

And, in a business known for turnover, the store has several long-time employees, including some who have been there for two decades or longer.

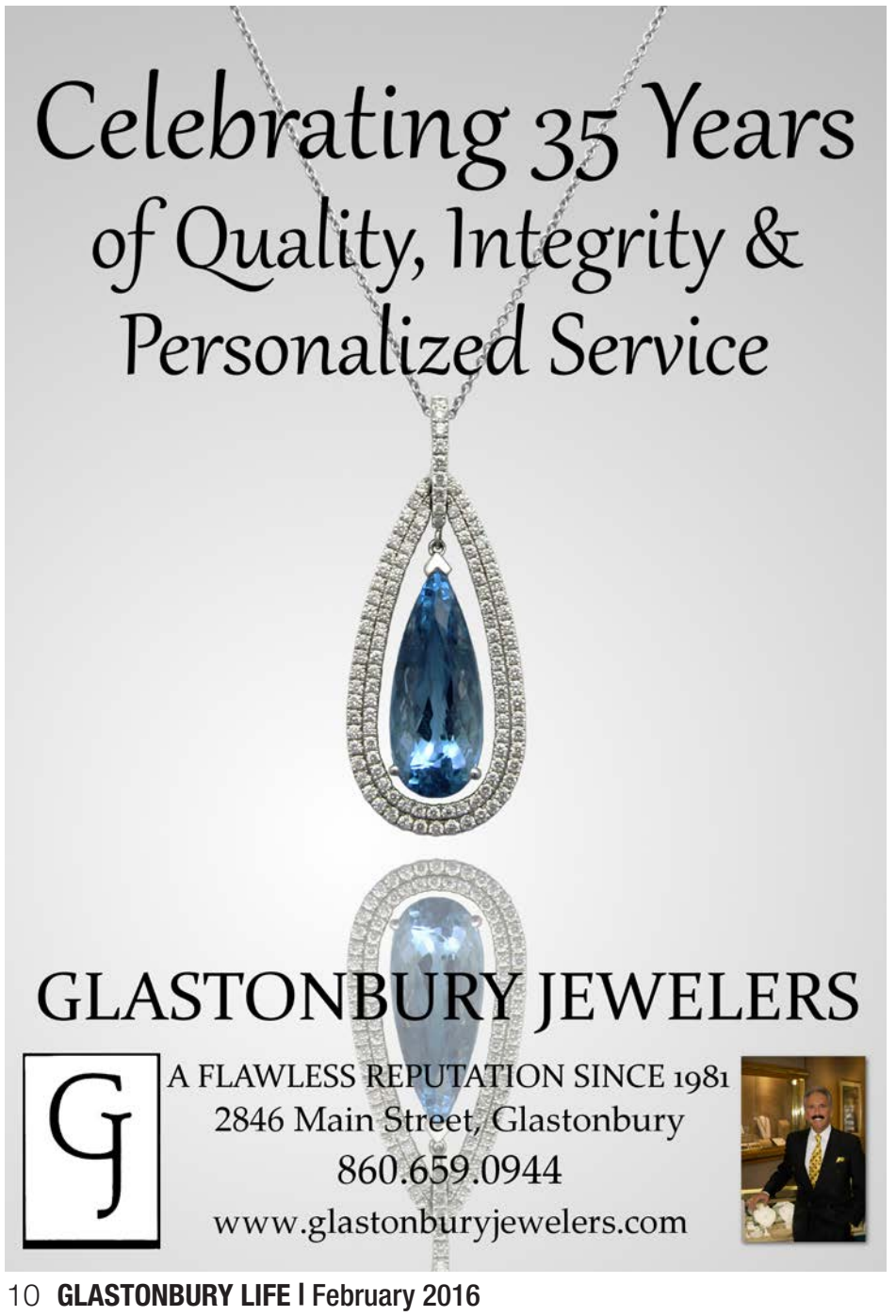
Romeo, who has enjoyed golfing and gardening through the years, said he likes to come into the store around 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning and leave around mid-afternoon. He's planning to spend six weeks in Florida this winter for the first time.

He's been known to pick up a little something for dinner on his way out the door.

"One of my favorite meals is a rotisserie chicken. Monday nights, we have an extensive menu, sweet and sour chicken, egg rolls, fried rice – I'll take that home. Our soups are outstanding," Romeo said.

And for dessert?

Romeo added, "I like some of the pastries we have." GL

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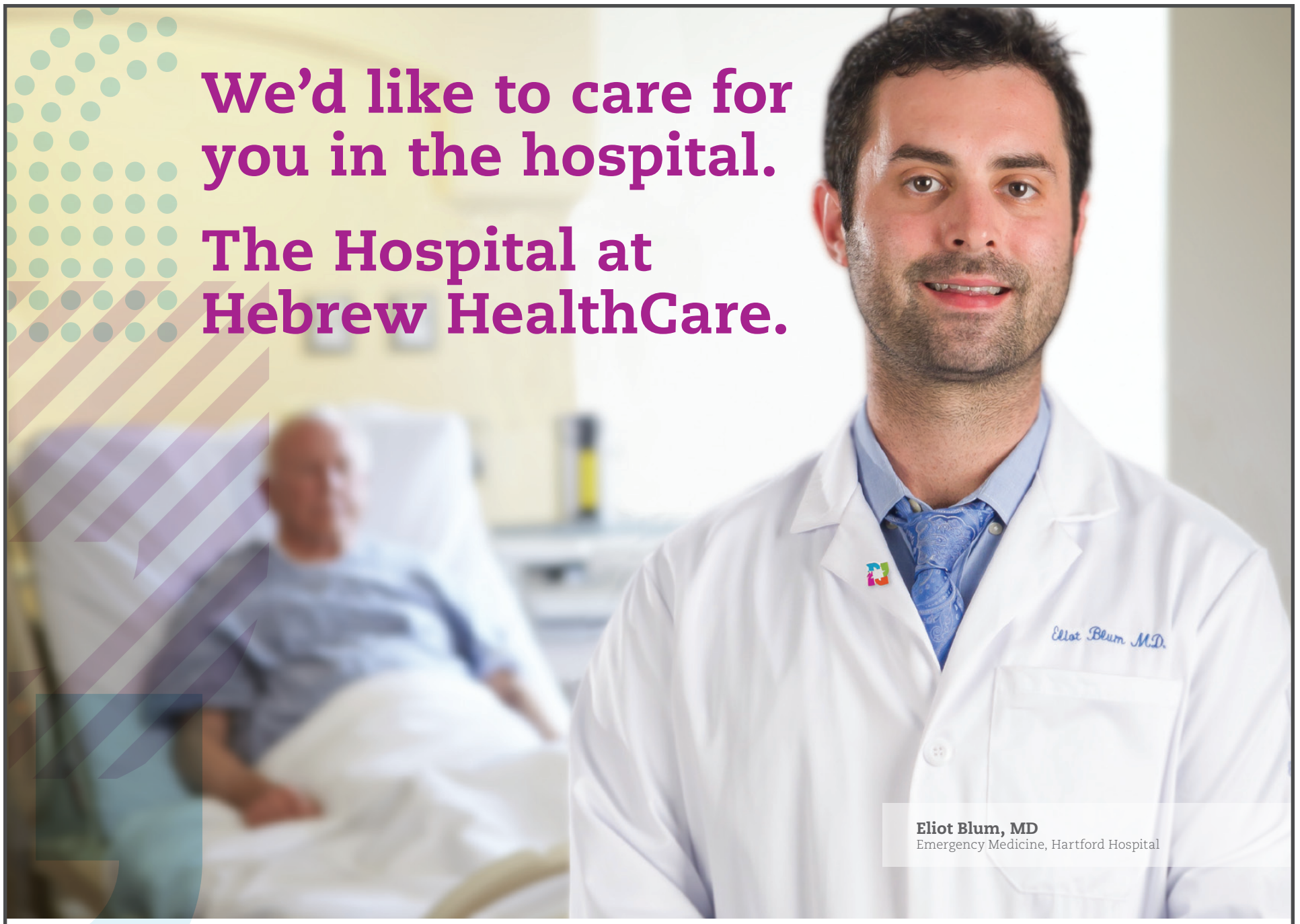


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Photos by TLB Architecture

Some changes would be made to the library's great hall, shown here looking toward the reference desk.

# Local library looks to change with the times

**by Nancy Thompson**
*Editor*

Remember when people went to libraries to borrow books, but not much else?

Those times are long gone.

"Libraries aren't the same anymore," said Welles-Turner Memorial Library Director Barbara Bailey. "We're beginning to see people using the library as a place to use their laptops and get Internet access, to go to classes and story times, to meet friends, to see the town nurse. We're starting to see the space used in different ways."


Minor emergency?

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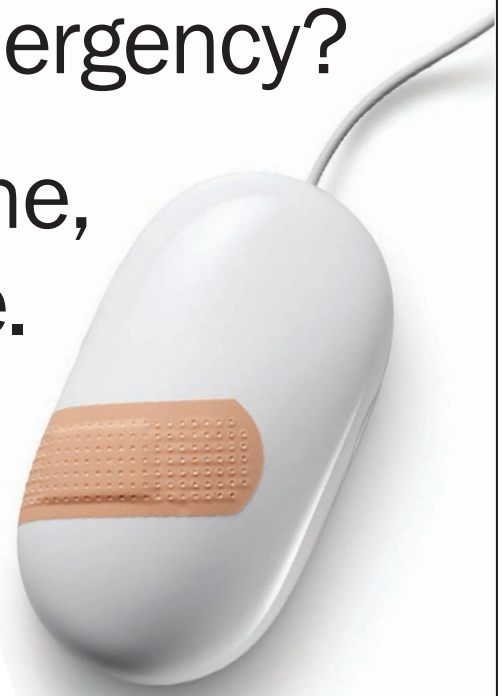

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Many of those changes are due to technology, which is dramatically changing traditional library functions such as circulation and research.

"We spend a lot of time with people showing them how to use their devices," Bailey said, adding that many people see their local library as "the town's living room."

Because of those changes and others, library and town officials decided early in 2014 to look into possible changes at the Main Street facility.

The library's Second Century Fund donated $50,000 for a study by TLB Architecture, a Chester-based architectural firm that specializes in libraries and other public buildings. Bailey said library staff members, architects and members of the public have been meeting since February of last year. The study was completed in December.

The survey results were not surprising.

"We're about 5,000 square feet short of program space," Bailey said. "But the good news is that we can build flexible space." As an example, she said a row of computers could be used by individuals most of the time, but also could be partially blocked off for a training session when needed.

She said a survey of patrons a few years ago revealed a need for more comfortable chairs and addition study rooms.

"Libraries are becoming like community centers," she said.

The report, titled "Space Planning and Design Study," includes statistics, photos, and recommendations for two possible projects and considers national trends and comments by library staff and members of the public who don't want to reduce the number of books available.

The report includes two options, a base option that would require a 23 percent reduction in shelving space with two small addition single-story additions, and a

Proposed renovations would include reading and computer rooms similar to those shown in this drawing.

Photos courtesy of TBL Architecture


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## Facts about the Welles-Turner Memorial Library

- The building at 2407 Main St. was completed in 1952 and expanded in 1965, with a more comprehensive addition opening in 1999
- The library's annual circulation is more than 450,000
- About 124,000 titles were available in the middle of 2014, including 200 periodical subscriptions
- About 14,000 people participate in more than 700 library-sponsored programs each year
- The library's computers have been used for more than 34,000 sessions
- Compared to libraries in similar-size towns, the local library:
  - is open more hours
  - spends more on library materials per capita
  - has a higher tax appropriation per capita
  - has lower program attendance and lower program expenditures per capita
  - has lower operating expenses per capita
  - has lower e-book circulation
  - has fewer full-time employees

*Source: Space Planning and Design Study Report, TLB Architecture*

more extensive proposal that would include a two-story addition at the rear of the building that would provide an additional 3,900 square feet with no reduction to the shelving area.

The smaller plan would cost an estimated $2.8 million, while the larger plan would cost about $4.8 million.

The master plan includes about 300 square feet for additional study rooms, 350 square feet of supervised activities area for the children's services department, and 250 square feet of automated book sorting equipment.

The architects' report described the young adult room as "undersized, underutilized and undifferentiated from the rest of the library" and recommended expanding or moving it and considering ways to attract more teenagers to the library.

The report also suggests relocating the workroom for the children's services department and creating a new activity room in that space, installing shelves to hold books collected for the Friends of the Welles-Turner Memorial Library's book sales, developing more inviting seating areas for patrons, and redoing the Main Street entrance area, possibly adding a gallery for local artists.

John Phelan, president of the library's Second Century Fund, said discussions have focused on what changes might be made, what the library does best, what services should be maintained, and what patrons see as the main function of the library.

"It's a great community resource," he said. "The staff is great, and maintaining that small-town feel is very important. There are many things we're seeing libraries do today that expand their reach from the traditional lending of books."

Phelan said focus groups have talked about expanding computer access, making the young adult room more attractive to teens, and creating a technology room with videos, printing and computer access. He said the Second Century Fund is focused on raising money for long-term improvements for the library and will ask the community for financial support.

Town Manager Richard J. Johnson said the town has been fortunate to have support groups such as the Second Century Fund and the friends' group working over the years to support the library.

"Expectations and the way patrons use the library has changed," he said, attributing those new expectations to technology and changing lifestyles. "We're considering reallocating space

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# Your thoughts:

*Libraries have come a long way since they were simply a place to go to borrow books. As the Welles-Turner Memorial Library looks to the future, we asked residents for their thoughts on the library and what they'd like to see there in the future. Here's some of what them said.*

I'd like to see more programs and activities for children with special needs, specifically younger children. I have a three-year-old with special needs. I was a nanny and I was involved with story time years and years ago. The reason why I didn't take my son is he has sensory issues and he's not the quiet, sitting still type.
*–Tracey Pennachio*

The library is so great at telling you about stories about people and other things. I have this website at school that would be great to have at the library for younger people and older people too. It just tells great stories.
*– Olivia Standish, 8*

Right now, my family uses it a lot for the kids, who are 5 and 3, checking out books for them, and their grandfather just took them for a book reading. The kids get a lot out of it. I admittedly don't get a lot of use out of it. Like everyone else, I get so much online. I'm mostly a non-fiction reader and so much of what I'm interested in can be found online.*–Nate Brahm*


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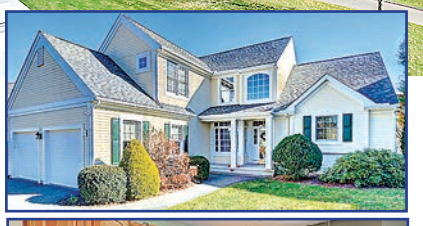

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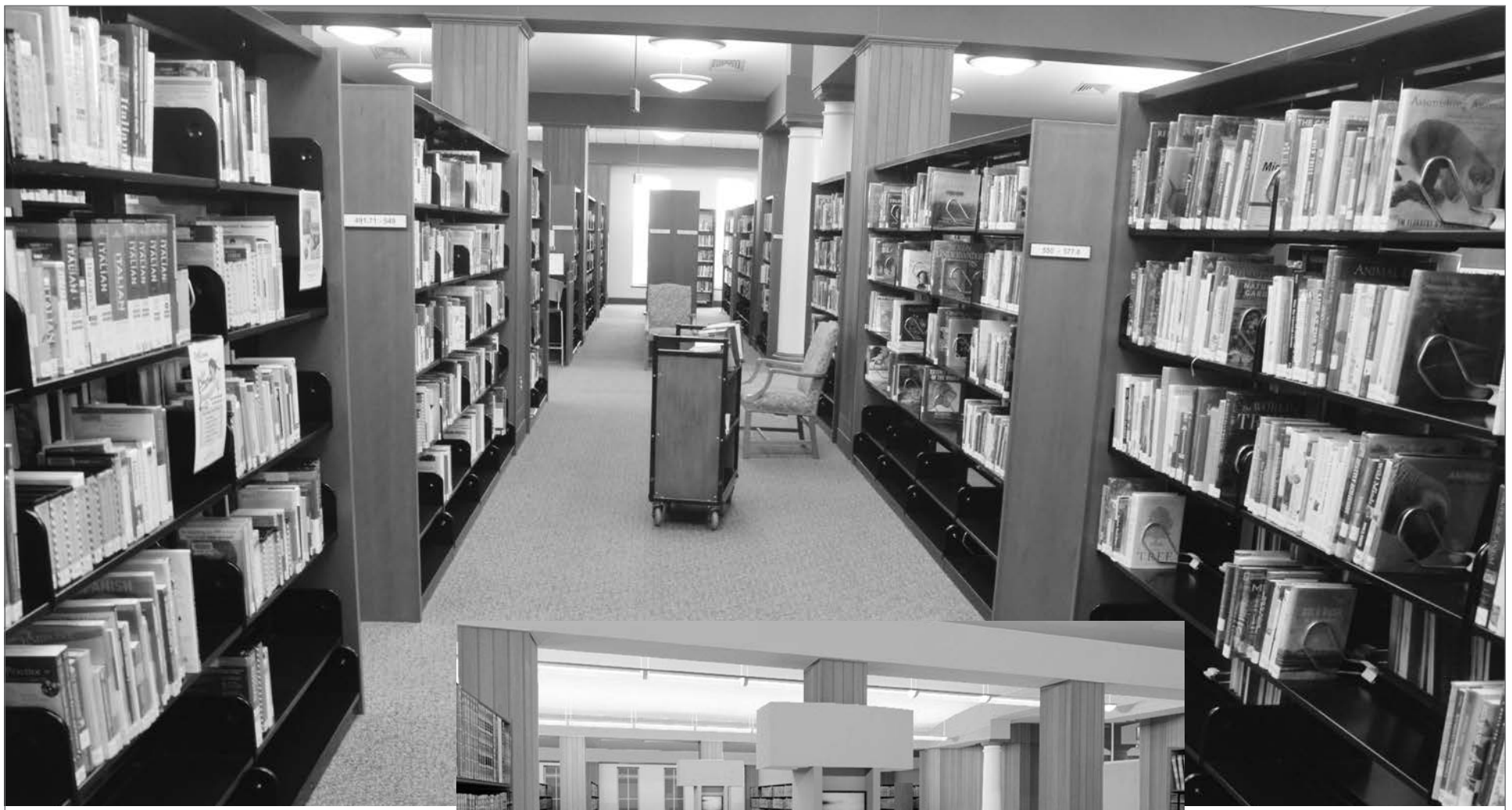

**Above is the current crosswise view from the non-fiction stacks. Inset: This drawing shows the proposed view across the reading and computer rooms, including public access catalog kiosks.**

and changing the way the library functions and have looked at changes that could take place within the library's four walls. We're also considering adding space and reconfiguring existing space."

Johnson said he expects town officials, library staff and the two support groups will work cooperatively to find cost-effective ways to implement changes and improvements.

"It's been a good process," he said. "It's a work in progress. Everyone is very supportive, and it's important to work cooperatively."

Bailey and Johnson both said they hope to find a variety of sources to fund whatever work is approved, including the Second Century Fund and the Friends of the Welles-Turner Memorial Library, state grants, and the town's capital improvement program. Johnson said he expects to include money for the library work in his proposed capital improvement plan for the 2016-2017 budget year. GL

Phtoos courtesy of TBL Architecture

**This is the current view of the library from the parking lot. Inset: This proposed two-story addition to the south wing would significantly increase the usable space in the library.**

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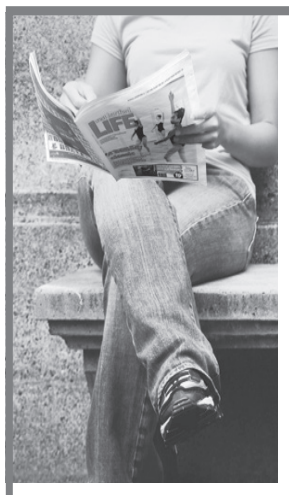

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# Business Notes

Courtesy photos

**The Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Cares Foundation** will donate $22,000 to My Sisters' Place, a Hartford organization that provides emergency shelter, permanent housing and other services to homeless women and children. Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage has an office in Glastonbury.

Tessa Jordan, a CPA with **Nicola, Yester & Company, P.C.,** has been named to the Connecticut Society of CPAs' list of new and young professionals to watch. Nomination to the list was based on professional or workplace contributions, community service, and involvement in the society.

**GoodWorks Insurance,** a local independent insurance agency, has donated $5,000 to the New Milford Visiting Nurse Association. The grand will support the association's hospice.

Local **Panera** Bread customers and employees helped collect holiday gifts for 60 children served by Place of Grace in Hartford.

**Employees of Gottfried & Somberg Wealth Management** and 60 of their clients sorted and packed food for 8,350 meals and more than 5,800 pounds of meat that were sent to local community kitchens and food banks as part of a "Give-Back Day" at Foodshare in Bloomfield. In addition, the company and its clients and friends donated more than $7,000 to Foodshare.

Lucia Lobraico, a registered dietitian, has opened **Healthy Living by Lucia,** a nutrition practice, at 2389 Main St. She also has an office in Rocky Hill. To learn more, visit healthylivingbylucia.com.

Tessa Jordan

**May, Bonee & Walsh** has been recognized by Renaissance Alliance Insurance Services for its 10 years of membership with the alliance.

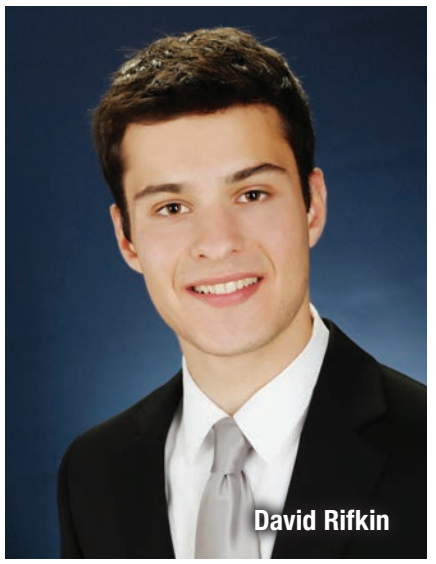
**Simsbury Bank** has opened a residential mortgage loan office at 2389 Main St. To reach the office, call 860-205-5253.

**Brookdale Buckingham,** formerly known as Emeritus at Buckingham Estates, is collecting gently used coats, jackets, boots, tennis shoes, warm socks, scarves and gloves through the end of February. The donations will be taken to the Salvation Army and Church Mouse, a thrift store operated by the Manchester Area Council of Churches.

Donations can be left at Brookdale Buckingham, 1824 Manchester Rd., from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. To learn more, call 860-647-1695. GL

# People Notes

Courtesy photos


David Rifkin

**David Rifkin** has completed the Common Ground program offered by Leadership Greater Hartford, offered to youth leaders in the area.

He has served as a White House intern, and also as an intern at JPMorgan Chase and for U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal. In addition he is the student-elect member of the UConn Board of Trustees, the lead manager of the UConn Student Managed Fun and a youth basketball and soccer coach. He is a junior in the honors program at UConn, where he has a 4.0 grade point average.

Damian Fox

**Damian Fox** has been named head coach of the Gaylord Wolfpack sled hockey team at Gaylord Hospital. The mean is made up of four women and eight men ranging in age from 20 to 63 years old and is the one team in the country to have placed three female players on the U.S. National Sled Hockey team.

**Glenn Maynard** has written Wayward Soul, a sequel to his novel, Desert Son. The new book was released in January.

Emily Donofrio

**Emily Donofrio,** a freshman at Glastonbury High School, has received a 2015 CHET Advance scholarship. She was recognized by State Treasurer Denise L. Nappier in a ceremony at the Legislative Office Building.

Local artist **Sarah Schneiderman** is part of the National Arts Program's exhibit at Capital Community College in Hartford. The exhibit will run through February 8. This is the third time she has exhibited with the National Arts Program. The artwork is displayed on the first and 11th floors of the college, which is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday until 4 p.m. **GL**

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# Local youth aims for the heights

## Derek Conti dreams of a snowboarding career

**by Nancy Thompson**
*Editor*

Photo by Brian Ambrose

Derek Conti's mother tried to teach him to ski for two years when he was a young child. He didn't like it, so his older brother, Michael, taught him how to snowboard instead.


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"I was really bad at it," he said of downhill skiing, which his parents and both brothers enjoy. "But I tried snowboarding and I loved it. It was cooler than skiing and it made me feel like I could do anything."

Not only does he love it, he's exceptionally good at it.

Derek, an eighth-grader at Smith Middle School, is spending the winter at the prestigious Mount Snow Academy, where he's honing his snowboarding skills and keeping up with his academics in an exclusive seven-day-a-week program that has produced professionals and international champions.

There are no guarantees, but it may well help him fulfill a dream he's had for many years.

"Ever since I was young, I always thought about being a pro, but I also thought how insanely hard it is to be a professional," the 13-year-old said. "In the past two years, I really started to see how much I love the sport and I want to take it as far as I possibly can."

He contacted Dillon Diel, who became his coach, and worked last year with Diel and a group of snowboarders. "I progressed drastically and I wanted to take it to a bigger level. That's how I got introduced to Mount Snow Academy," he said. "They have the best coaching and park in the East at Carinthia Parks. They've had multiple Olympians and X-Games winners who were graduates of Mount Snow Academy. I really like their style of academics and the sports they offer."

Derek was accepted into the program and headed to Mount Snow in November and met with his coaches to set specific goals, including learning more difficult tricks on the rails and jumps.

**Some days I start at 8 a.m. and finish at 7 p.m. I go seven days a week with no days off. It's pretty intense."**

**–Derek Conti**

He said every day is a little different, both in terms of what he does and how long the day lasts.

"Some days I go to school for half the day and then train the other half. Some days I train all day and other days I go to school all day," he said. "Also, we have dry land training, which is running, yoga, trampoline work, core strength, agility training, leg work and skateboarding. Some days I start at 8 a.m. and finish at 7 p.m. I go seven days a week with no days off. It's pretty intense."

He's progressing well in his favorite element, rails, and improving in his weakest area, the halfpipe.

"My two coaches, Tommy Burke and Tyler Redes, got me to progress very quickly in rails. Ever since I've been here I've really improved a lot," he said. "They are awesome coaches who really push me and they are great people."

Derek's mother, Janine, is an avid skier who taught her husband,


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* As reported in www.DietsInReview.com

Joe, how to ski when they were friends as teenagers. Derek's brothers, Michael and Joey, ski and snowboard. The family has had a home in Wilmington, Vermont, near Mount Snow, for 15 years and stay there almost every weekend during the winter.

"I grew up having a second home up north and so I wanted to create that same experience for our family," Janine Conti said. "It's our family time and we all love the winter season and all winter sports. We all snowmobile – Derek is really good at that too. We just love the outdoors."

In Vermont, the family owns Haystack Home Services, LLC, a business in which they renovate houses and turn them into attractive getaway homes. Janine designs and decorates the houses, while Joe manages local contractors and the boys help in any way they can. She also is starting a home staging division of the business to help people sell their homes more easily and plans to enlist the boys' help in moving furniture, decorations and furnishings in and out of homes.

When not snowboarding, Derek enjoys snowmobiling, spending time with his family and friends, jet skiing, wakeboarding, skateboarding, mountain biking, baseball, photography and video editing.

**Derek Conti is spending the winter in Vermont, where he's attending the Mt. Snow Academy.**

Photo by Brian Ambrose



Courtesy photo

Looking to the future, Derek wants to go as far as he can in the sport, get a lot of sponsors, and qualify for the Olympics and X-Games in slopestyle events.

"In five years, if going to the X-Games doesn't work out, I'd hope to be living in Vermont snowboarding every day professionally for my sponsors. When I'm not riding I'd want to be working for my parents' company up here or become a coach at Mount Snow Academy."

And if snowboarding doesn't work out, he plans to continue to do well academically and go to college at the University of Vermont. After college, he'd like to continue riding professionally or return to Mount Snow Academy as a coach.

Derek is impressing the staff at the academy.

"I have come to know Derek as a hard-working and committed athlete in his time with us," said Todd Ormiston, the academy's head of school. "His coach sees an athlete who is inspired by his love for the sport and drive to progress in his skills. He competed in his first official event last weekend, finishing in the top 10 for his age group. Just as important as his results was the huge smile he had on his face when he shared the experience with me this morning." **GL**


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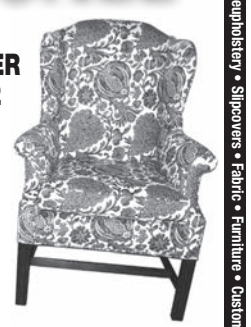

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# ‘Never capitulate’

## New book describes wrestling superstar’s drive, humble beginnings

**by Mara Dresner**
*Staff Writer*

Photo by Mara Dresner

**Bob Backlund overcame a challenging childhood to have an impressive career as a professional wrestler. He tells his story in “Backlund: From All-American Boy to Professional Wrestling’s World Champion.”**

It was unlikely that Bob Backlund would ever become an athlete, never mind a world-renowned phenomenon. Born to a poor family in Minnesota, in a town of about 2,000 people, he had a decidedly slow start to life.

“My mom told me that I never moved for the first two years of my life. It kind of explains the way I am. I never associated with little kids. I never got on the floor and played with them. I just lay there,” Backlund said. His spine didn’t develop properly, and his parents were never given an explanation for what had happened.

He faced other early challenges as well.

“My dad was a drinker. We didn’t have a very pleasant home. My parents were hardworking people, but we lived day to day. We kind of lived off the farm. We had a 40-acres farm,” he said. “In my family, no one had ever been an athlete or thought about being an athlete. My dad had four brothers. Nobody was an athlete, nobody went to college.”

His mother was a big fan of wrestling and watching was a weekly tradition.

“In Minnesota, wrestling would come on from 9 o’clock to 10 o’clock on Saturday mornings. If you were somewhere, you had to be home by 9 o’clock on Saturday mornings and you couldn’t leave the house until 10 o’clock. You had to watch wrestling,” Backlund recalled.

He thought school might offer an escape.

“I wasn’t a very good student. I wasn’t a very good athlete,” he said. “I had a rough situation at home. I would do things not because I wanted to do them but because I didn’t want to go home. When I started school, I was happy going because I didn’t have to be at home. At school, I found out I wasn’t very good at it and it got depressing to go to school also. I was having problems learning, maybe because of the two years, but I’m not going to blame them, although they say the mind starts developing at a young age.”

His early attempts at sports were a failure, as well.

“I went out for baseball because I didn’t have to be at home. I struck out two times in a game of T-ball, that’s how bad I was,” Backlund said.

His junior and senior high schools were in the same building.

“I started going down to the wrestling room after school was over. It wasn’t because I loved wrestling; it was because I didn’t want to be at home. Then I went out for football for the same reason,” said Backlund, whose autobiography, “Backlund: From All-American Boy to Professional Wrestling’s World Champion” was released last fall.

He had a turning point in eighth grade.

“I was really standing on the fence, probably that close to falling off the fence and becoming a complete loser,” he said. “I got involved with some older kids. I was about the same height in eighth grade as I am now, about 6 feet tall. I was getting into fights at night. I was drinking beer with them. There was an incident one time when I found out they weren’t really my friends.”

At a place called The Kitten Club, some of his friends got into a confrontation with a motorcycle gang and turned to Backlund for help. When he turned around his so-called friends were gone.

“I walked home that night. It took me three hours. All I could think about was, how do you know when you have a friend? I didn’t find a friend for four years. In the long run, the thing about peer pressure was one of the most important things I ever learned. In the wrestling business, drugs were outrageous. And I said no. They were doing coke; they were doing steroids; they were doing marihuana. I wouldn’t do it.”

It wasn’t the only tough lesson that Backlund learned.

At end of eighth grade, he wanted to quit football but stayed on the team.

“If I would have quit that, I would have been a quitter then. I would have quit wrestling, I would have quit school. I’d probably be laying in the mud,” he said.

By the tenth grade, he was competing in wrestling, without success.

“I got beat all the time. In the district tournament in Minnesota, I didn’t even make it to the second round. I lost all my matches,” he said.

At the state championships, he was inspired by a wrestler who was successful in his weight class.

“He went on to win the Minnesota state championship. I looked at him and he became an instant idol to me, and I said, ‘I want to do that. I can do that.’”

He didn’t have money for weight equipment, so he took two five-gallon pails, which he filled with cement, attaching a pipe between the pails.

“That was my first barbell. It weighed about 180 pounds. I couldn’t get it off the ground,” Backlund said. “I wanted to get stronger.”

He asked his coach for a football helmet and drilled a hole in the helmet, adding 25 pounds of weight to wear while he was running.

“That way I could strengthen my neck while I was working my legs,” he said. “I still have that helmet.”

That year, a new football coach came to the school and invited Backlund and another classmate to tour training centers with him.

“For me to get into a car with another adult, it was a very big experience for me. It made me feel a lot better about myself. Most of my thoughts were gloom and doom up until that period of my life,” he said.

He began to get to school at 6:30 a.m. with his mother, who was a cook at the school. He’d work out with a classmate before school.

“We pushed each other. Ross Johnson was the son you’d want to have, and I was the complete opposite. We were so different. We got to

Courtesy photo

Wrestling superstar Bob Backlund became friends with Brian Keenan, a police lieutenant from Springfield, Mass., after Keenan wrote to him.

love each other in the gym but we never saw each other outside the gym," Backlund said.

Johnson died of leukemia soon after high school.

"That was a setback. I had a friend in him, and it took me four years to find that friend," he said.

Backlund found his first athletic successes in high school. After his disastrous matches as a sophomore, he returned stronger as a junior and wrestled the same boy who had inspired him so much the year before.

"I wrestled him in the finals. The Princeton gym was full of people and people were very supportive and that's never happened to me. That's never happened before and I went out and I destroyed Kirk Anderson, and I found out hard work pays off," Backlund said. "You know what? I thought I was ready to go out in the world. I was undefeated at the time."

The wrestling media gave Backlund a lot of positive feedback and Backlund learned another life lesson.

"I wasn't ready mentally. I didn't know about the mind, that the mind can control everything. I started to believe [I would win] without having the match," he said. "I struggled. I felt like I was out of condition. I lost the match. In wrestling, you shake the hand of your opponent, you shake the hand of the coaches, you shake the hand of the team. I went right to the dressing room. I took a shower in St. Cloud, Minn., then I saw my mom and dad and I just started crying. I let them down. I let my parents down. I let the people in the town down because I didn't do my best.

"I've had other lessons that were pretty important in my life, but this was the lesson. I learned you never let up, you never let up. You don't look at someone's record and say it's going to be easy. You don't look and say he's from Danbury, it's going to be easy. I didn't want to know their name or address. All I want to know if he beats me, he's going to beat me at my best. I learned about controlling my mind and being ready for a struggle, a battle," he continued. "It's one of the greatest lessons I've learned. I appreciate that lesson. I think it helped me. My opponent beat me but he deserved it. I learned more from that match than he did."

Backlund went to junior college before transferring to North Dakota State, where he both played football and wrestled.

"I almost went to the University of Minnesota but they wouldn't let me do both," he said.

His goal was to play professional football.

"I played semipro football for about a year. Then I realized there are people who played for 10 years and never made it to professional football," he said.

At the gym where he worked out, he met "Superstar" Billy Graham.

"He was a big name in professional wrestling. He was very successful with the business. He was doing curls, I was doing bench presses. He asked me if I was interested in getting into the business. I said I wasn't. After the season was over with the minor league team, I started thinking maybe wrestling was OK," said Backlund, who took a job doing plastering and stuccoing and saving enough money – $500 – to attend a wrestling school.

"I paid up and went through school system and that's how I got into professional wrestling," he said.

It wasn't quite the glamorous career he envisioned. He drove to his first match, in Baton Rouge, La., in a green 1968 Chevy Impala.

"It had a voluminous trunk and I'm saying that for a reason. I get in the car and I have $20 in my pocket and I have everything I own in the car. My mom gives me a hug and says, 'Do your best.' I get down there and I have 29 cents in my pocket. I made a reservation at the Sheraton that night," he said.

Backlund won his match and was handed an envelope. He had four days until his next match.

"There was $5 in it," he said. "How far could $5 go? I had to use a pay phone and canceled my reserva-

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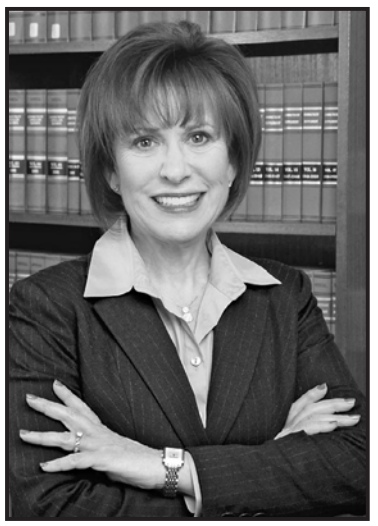

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tion at the Sheraton. I went into a grocery store and bought as many cans of tuna as I could and a can opener. I slept in the voluminous trunk that night. I'm homeless, I'm broke and I'm sleeping in the trunk of the car. That's where I started out.

"Four years later, I'm standing in Madison Square Garden in the middle of ring, 27,000 people watching what's going on. I get done with the match and the person hands the WWF championship to me and his name was Superstar Billy Graham. How big of a miracle is that?"

Backlund's career spanned almost four decades in which he competed against stars such as Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, "Macho Man" Randy Savage and Andre the Giant.

Backlund said the world of wrestling has changed.

"When I was in the WWF, there was just one championship. There was a war going on. It was very competitive behind the scenes. I always wanted to do the most, I would want to be the best. The competition was behind the scenes. You'd want to entertain the people as well as you could every time you went into the ring. It's all business," he said.

While he has many favorite moments, one of his proudest was being asked to sign Easter eggs for then-president Ronald Reagan.

"There were football players, baseball players, basketball players there. It was really great going to the White House. I was in the Oval Office. It was a pleasure meeting Mr. Reagan," he said.

Backlund was unsure what life after wrestling would bring. He said that reading "Think and Grow Rich" by Napoleon Hill in 1985, was a game-changer.

"I got so I was just thinking about the past and not the future. I wasn't depressed but I didn't think I had any future. 'Think and Grow Rich' gave me a spark," he said.

He had a book about his life written in 1985 but couldn't find a publisher. Still, he knew he wanted to tell the story of his life, and in 2009, he got a FedEx from Rob Miller, saying he was interested in telling his story. Their first meeting – at the Welles-Turner Memorial Library – lasted four hours.

"I was a swimmer on the national stage and his character and the way he conducted himself and the way he carried himself resonated with me as a 10-, 11-, 12-year-old kid," said Miller, who co-wrote the book. "My agent and I were sitting in New York City one day, talking about what our next project would be. He mentioned he had just done a wrestling book and it had done well. I went off on this little two-minute tribute to Bob, and he said, 'Has Backlund ever written a book?' And we whipped out our phones and Googled it, and he hadn't. He said you should write him a letter and I did."

**"His life and the story that is told in the book is so much more than wrestling."**
**–Rob Miller**

Miller was more impressed at the end of the project than he was when it started.

"He was even more of a hero than what I thought than when I was watching him on TV," Miller said. "His life and the story that is told in the book is so much more than wrestling. It is a story about perseverance and faith and belief in oneself and dedication, all the sort of old-school values that people just kind of gloss over today. But if you were to ask the question how is it that this derelict kid from Princeton, Minn., that was circling the drain when he was 14 years old ended up as one of the most recognized sports figures in the world. He could not go through downtown Tokyo without getting mobbed by fans. The same was true in New York. How do you get there? Whether you're an athlete or a student or an immigrant, the story of Bob Backlund is the answer to the question. It's day after day believing in your goals, checking in on them, putting your nose to the grindstone and doing the right thing day after day. I know it sounds trite, but that's really the story of how Bob

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did what he did."

Backlund wants his story to serve as inspiration to others.

"I hope this book helps moms and dads and young people get in there and struggle and learn from their mistakes and become a better person because at one time I was a complete loser," he said.

Backlund and his wife, Corki, a gymnastics coach, moved to Glastonbury in 1978. They have a daughter, Carrie. For many years, he owned Backlund Energy LLC, which he sold in anticipation of the book's publication.

Brian Keenan, a police lieutenant from Springfield, is a lifelong wrestling fan, who saw Backlund wrestle at Boston Garden.

"When I was a kid, Bob was our hero. He was a believable guy. He was a normal-looking guy who would wrestle all these big monsters and would win all the time," he said.

Keenan wrote to Backlund in 2007 after seeing a video he'd made. Backlund wrote him back, misunderstanding the purpose of the letter.

"He thought I wanted him to be my trainer. That wasn't the case," Keenan said.

The two talked by phone and eventually met for lunch.

"We were talking about exercise and working out. I wasn't in very good shape at the time. He told me to read 'Think and Grow Rich.' It developed into a mentorship, a friendship," said Keenan, who was on hand when Backlund was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame. "He's the guy when you have a flat tire at Boise, Idaho, at 3 in the morning, he'd come and get me."

As big a wrestling fan as he is, Keenan is perhaps more impressed by Backlund's character.

"I have a lot of friends in the wrestling business. Bob was a guy who never compromised his principles for anything, never. He was a guy at 60 years old who looked like he was 25 years old. When I was first meeting with Bob, he was very reserved. He didn't know if I was a kooky wrestling fan. The meeting was amazing. I was able to get the value of sincerity and hard work and decency. It was almost like a throwback to my father's friends and the people from the neighborhood. He was the real deal," Keenan said. "It doesn't matter to Bob who you are or who you're not. He treats Vince McMahon the same the way he treats a 10-year-old kid in a schoolyard. He's probably the most decent, genuine human being I've ever met in my life."

**"Every day I convince myself to have a positive mental attitude all day and I'm never going to capitulate on that rule."**
**-Bob Backlund**

Backlund's been giving a lot of talks promoting his book and using his early years to motivate others.

"There's a lot of opportunity. You can't just sit back and wait for them to come to you, you have to go after them," he said. "When I sign a book, I sign it 'Never capitulate.' I sign my name and I say, "PMA,' positive mental attitude all day. I'm 66 years old. Every day I convince myself to have a positive mental attitude all day and I'm never going to capitulate on that rule." GL

*Bob Backlund will speak at the Welles-Turner Memorial Library, 2407 Main St., February 7 at 2 p.m. Register at wtmlib.info or call the reference desk at 860-652-7720.*

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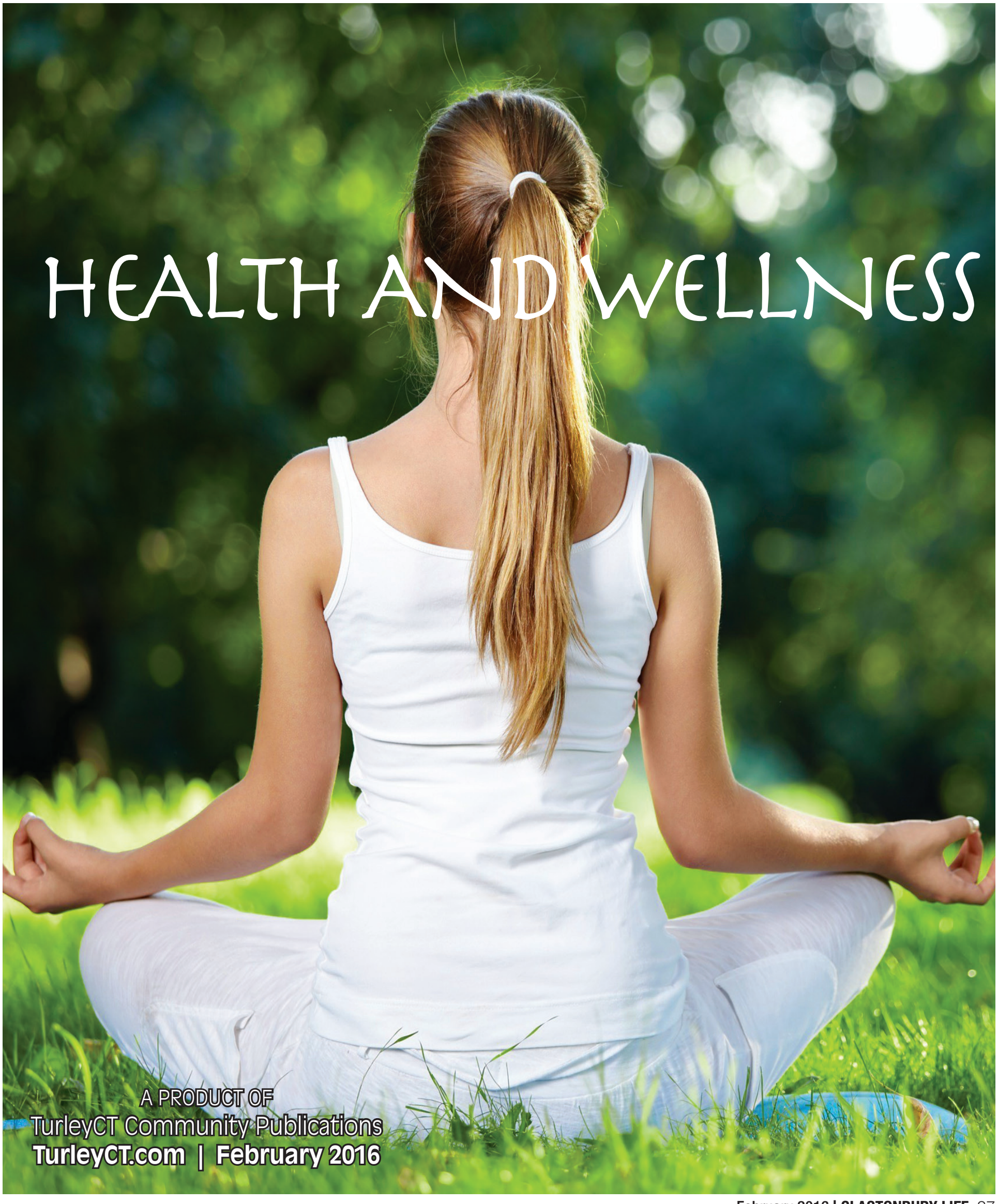
HEALTH AND WELLNESS
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# Have a heart

## Locals bounce back from health scares

**by Mara Dresner**
*Staff Writer*

Sometimes major health events come out of the blue. Other times, the symptoms have been building for years, but we don't always know that they're a disaster in the making. These area residents have all faced major heart issues and are doing great on the other side. In honor of American Heart Month, they've shared their stories.

**Name:** Michael Fox
**Age:** 71
**Hometown:** Newington
**Occupation:** retired
**Success story:**
A couple years before the surgery, I was having problems catching my breath. I usually use the VA. They've been very good to me. Cardiology checked it out; they had gastroenterology check it out; the lung people. There wasn't really anything wrong. I had an angiogram a few years ago. There was some blockage but not enough to do anything about it. A year or so passed and this keeps going on and on.

On Oct. 12, Columbus Day, I take my regular bath, I read the paper, I'm having chest pain. It's the holiday. The VA here is closed. I decided to take an ambulance to Saint Francis. I'm glad I did.

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# Health & *Wellness*

Tuesday. I take the nuclear stress test, and they say they need to do an angiogram. By Friday, after all the rigmarole, at 8 a.m., I'm in the operating room having double bypass. I had three blocked arteries, but I didn't have enough blood vessels to do all three.

After the surgery, I spent a couple of days at the hospital. Then I went to Jefferson House here in Newington for rehabilitation. I spent almost a week there. I'm home and scheduled for cardiac rehab. It's a three-month program and, boy, am I glad I did it.

I'm feeling so good now. I go in three days a week for an hour. I do treadmill work, stationary bike work and free weights. I walk a couple of miles at home two, three, maybe five days a week. I used to walk five miles a day.

I started getting used to eating salad either with lunch or for lunch. For breakfast, I have a fruit smoothie with nonfat yogurt or 2 percent milk. I lost 20 pounds. I feel much better. I could go dancing every night now.

**Name:** Mary Lu Maturo
**Age:** 75
**Hometown:** Wethersfield
**Occupation:** retired
**Success story:**

I've never had heart problems; I've never had anything. I've never been to the hospital except to have babies. Last March when I went to bed at night and would lie on my side, I would feel my heart pounding and I'd feel a pressure behind my sternum. I told my doctor and he did a cardiogram and sent me to the hospital. They did more tests and I continued on.

I exercised at the senior center three times a week. I liked to walk with friends at the Wethersfield Green, but whenever I would start walking, I'd get that pressure behind my breast bone, so I started to just meet them for coffee after. I'd get out of breath, but not terribly. I could still go on with my normal routine.

Then in the summertime, it got more frequent. On Labor Day weekend, I went to close two umbrellas outside, one by the pool and one by the patio. I got so out of breath.

That had never happened and that frightened me.

I called my doctor and he said to go in for a cardiogram. There was a cancellation the next day. My doctor said, "We won't fool around." So, the following Wednesday, they did an angiogram. I figured everything would be fine. They told me I had 90 percent blockage in four arteries and I wouldn't be going home. It was done Friday morning on Sept. 11. I was in the hospital for about a week, then in Jefferson House.

I did really well there. Each week I felt better. I never had any pain to speak of. If I took a deep breath, it would hurt. I was all set to leave Jefferson House, when I got an infection in my leg, so I had to stay a little longer.

Now I feel great. I exercise three times a week at the hospital. Today, I signed up with the town's fitness room. I plan on walking on the treadmill. It makes me feel good, it makes my legs feel stronger. If I don't exercise, it makes it harder to go up the stairs. I don't use salt at all. I feel like I'm in my 50s again!

**Name:** Carolyn Levine
**Age:** 71
**Hometown:** West Hartford
**Occupation:** professional conservator and certified geriatric care manager
**Success story:**

My job was quite stressful and I had high blood pressure. I was on medication for it, but I was very active. I never saw this coming.

We were at a friend's house for the evening playing cards and there were 12 of us or so and I just didn't feel that great. We went home and I was getting into bed and I got a terrible pain in back of my neck. So, I laid down on the bed and my husband called the doctor, a friend of ours, and he said, "Give her five minutes and if it happens again, go to the emergency room."

That's what we did. That was the first sign of anything. That's probably when the aortic aneurysm dissected. I went into the emergency room at about 11 at night and they started

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### *Stop smoking*
Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease. If you smoke, quitting is the best thing you can do for your health.

doing all kinds of tests, but nothing was showing up. My husband finally went home at 4 or 5 in the morning. I said, "Go get my clothes and my cell phone. I'll be going home in the morning."

The thoracic surgeon and cardiologist were there looking over all the records and they said, "You know what? I have one more test to do and if it's what I think it is, she'll need to go right into surgery. Only 1 percent of people survive a dissected aortic aneurysm. Even if she does come out of surgery, she'll be compromised because of the lack of oxygen. She will not be the person you know." That's how they left it with my husband and adult son and daughter, and 13 hours later I came out of surgery.

While in cardiac intensive care, I was a code blue. I stopped breathing and they had to re-intubate me. By the third week, they put me in the step-down cardiac unit. I had no idea until I was ready to go to rehab what really happened to me. I went to Mount Sinai Rehab/Saint Francis, I think for 12 days. When I started rehab, I wasn't really walking well at all and I kept falling asleep. In the first exercise, I had to take soft alphabet blocks and put them in order and I had no idea how to do that.

When I got home from rehab, I started calling my clients; they're all elderly and they knew something had happened to me. I would talk to them on the phone and finally, I started going to visit them. I'm working full time. I remember all my clients and all their stories and I just love them. It's a rebirth; it's a miracle. I wear a bracelet all the time that says "blessed." **GL**


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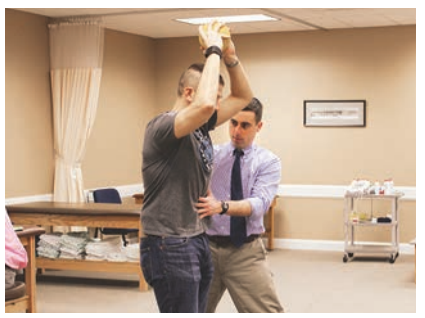

ONE ON ONE

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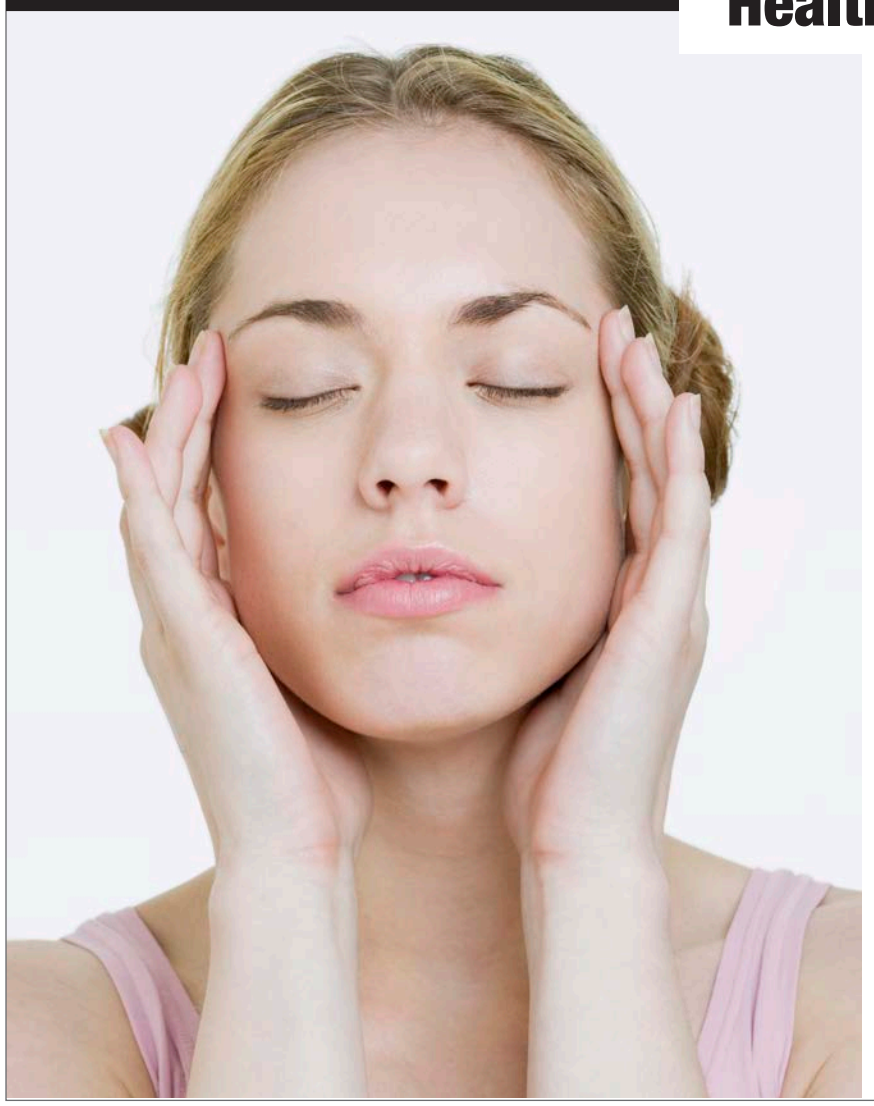
## Health & *Wellness*



# Five ways to stay mentally *strong*

**by Alison Jalbert**
*Assistant Editor*

New Year's resolutions often include pledges to improve on physical strength, which is important, but an equally important area to work on is mental strength.

Being mentally strong can provide benefits in all areas of life.

Jayne Dean, a licensed marriage and family therapist and practicing psychotherapist at West Hartford Counseling Center, said there are many different aspects that make a person mentally healthy.

"They all relate to each other," she said. "If you pick one area, usually the other areas will begin to change."

Here are five ways to increase mental strength.

**Take care of yourself.** Basic things such as getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising are all key to being mentally strong, Dean said. It's also important to include quiet time in life, whether it's meditation, reflection, prayer, or simply taking time to rest.

**Be aware of your emotions.** Dean said "an expressed feeling is a managed feeling," meaning a person is able to identify what they are feeling and put it into words, either for themselves or to someone else.

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## Health & *Wellness*

That helps manage stress and deal with emotional charges that happen in the body.

**Identify bad habits and work toward breaking them.** A habit is usually a way of managing stress or dealing with a need, Dean explained.

The path to eliminating that can be difficult, but it begins with a person recognizing they want to make a change and considering what need is met by what they're doing, whether it's smoking, overeating, drinking, compulsive exercising or rigidity.

"It begins there – having some compassion for yourself as to how that need came into existence," Dean said. "It starts with befriending and learning about the habit. That contemplation period is a very, very important part of the process. There are actually things happening in your brain to shift the pattern."

Habits can't necessarily be broken overnight, but starting to shift the way in which it's thought about shifts what a person can do about it, then the actual physical changes that need to be made will eventually happen.

**Have a strong social network.** This is important for mental strength because it enables a person to be able to express themselves to another person, Dean said. It also means there are people around to do pleasurable activities with, and there are positive events planned on the calendar. Having a strong social circle also makes it easier to reach out and ask for help when it's needed.

**Grow by encountering the new.** Seeking out and encountering new experiences, along with learning a new skill, trying something new, or simply mixing up a routine can help with mental strength.

"We can all get habituated into automatically doing the same things the same way at the same time," Dean said.

"[Changing routines] can help build those mental muscles. Mix up those patterns, mix up those things that you do every day."

This does a lot neurologically.

"Doing things new and different allows more information to bubble up, to become available and guide you in everyday life." **GL**

**"We can all get habituated into automatically doing the same things the same way at the same time. [Changing routines] can help build those mental muscles. Mix up those patterns, mix up those things that you do every day."**

**– Jayne Dean, a licensed marriage and family therapist and practicing psychotherapist at West Hartford Counseling Center**

# February *calendar*

| Su | Mo | Tu | We | Th | Fr | Sa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | | | | | |

**1 Networking workshop for job-seekers**, 6:30 p.m., Welles-Turner Memorial Library Friends Room 2407 Main St. Register by calling 860-652-7720.

**3 Book discussion group,** 7 p.m., Welles-Turner Memorial Library Friends Room 2407 Main St. This month's book is "The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to his White Mother" by James McBride. No registration needed. Call 860-652-7720 to learn more.

**5 Owl prowl** at Earle Park, 7 p.m., CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St. Pre-registration preferred. $8 for members, $10 for non-members, children half price. 860-633-8402 or ctaudubon.org.

**7 WWF Hall of Fame wrestler and Glastonbury resident Bob Backlund**, 2 p.m., Welles-Turner Memorial Library Friends Room 2407 Main St. Registration requested. Call 860-652-7720.

**SuperbOWL**, 2 p.m., CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St. $8 for members, $10 for non-members, children half price. 860-633-8402 or ctaudubon.org.

**9 Interviewing skills workshop for job-seekers,** 6:30 p.m., Welles-Turner Memorial Library Friends Room 2407 Main St. Register by calling 860-652-7720.

**Town council,** 7 p.m., town hall council chambers, 2155 Main St. 860-652-7710 or glastonbury-ct.gov.

**12 Planetarium show in observance of International Darwin Day,** 6 p.m., Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium, 95 Oak St. Tickets available at www.glastonburyplanetarium.org for $4.25. For more information, email Planetarium@Glastonburyus.org or call 860-652-4910, ext. 364.

**13 Planetarium show: The Zula Patrol,** 2:30 p.m. Suitable for young children. Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium, 95 Oak St. Tickets available at www.glastonburyplanetarium.org for $4.25. For more information, email Planetarium@Glastonburyus.org or call 860-652-4910, ext. 364.

**Planetarium show: Romancing the Stars,** 7:30 and 9 p.m., Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium, 95 Oak St. Tickets available at www.glastonburyplanetarium.org for $4.25. For more information, email Planetarium@Glastonburyus.org or call 860-652-4910, ext. 364.

**16 Keep Up With Your Grandkids** session on Microsoft Excel 1 basics, 3 p.m., Welles-Turner Memorial Library, 2407 Main St. 860-652-7720 or wtmlib.com

**Town plan and zoning commission,** 7 p.m., town hall council chambers, 2155 Main St. glastonbury-ct.gov.

**19 Guided bird walk**, 7:30 a.m., CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St. $5 members, $10 non-members, payable at the door. 860-633-8402 or ctaudubon.org.

**20 Kids' book sale,** 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Welles Turner Memorial Library Friends Room, 2407 Main St. Most hard-cover books $1, most paperbacks 50 cents. 860-652-7728 or wtmlib.com

**23 Town council,** 7 p.m., town hall council chambers, 2155 Main St. 860-652-7710 or glastonbury-ct.gov.

**Chronic pain options with Raymond Squier, M.D.,** 6 p.m., Glastonbury Health Care Center, 1175 Hebron Ave. Sponsored by the Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce. Members $5, non-members $10. Email tina@glastonburychamber.com for more information.

**24 Mental health and substance abuse with Pamela Mulready** of Rushford Center, 6 p.m., Rushford Center, 110 National Dr. Sponsored by the Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce. Members $5, non-members $10. Email tina@glastonburychamber.com for more information.

**25 From Earth to the Universe, a 30-minute voyage through time and space,** 6 p.m., Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium, 95 Oak Street. Tickets available at www.glastonburyplanetarium.org for $4.25. For more information, email Planetarium@Glastonburyus.org or call 860-652-4910, ext. 364.

**Save a Life Tour,** alcohol awareness and distracted driving prevention, 5:30 p.m., Academy Building, 2143 Main St.

**26 Watch the 6 NATIONs rugby game, Wales v. France** with the Welse Society of Western New England, 3 p.m. $5 donation toward the cost of streaming. Reserve a spot by emailing WelshWNE@gmail.com. Directions will be forwarded at that time.

**27 Welsh Society of Western New England genealogy group**, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors welcome. Bring a Welsh family tree and a lunch dish to share. Reserve a spot by emailing WelshWNE@gmail.com. Directions will be forwarded at that time.

**Coffeehouse Project sponsored by the Glastonbury Community Action Partnership,** 7 to 10 p.m., Academy cafeteria and teen center, 2143 Main St. No charge. To learn more, visit www.gladpreventioncouncil.org or call 860-652-7674.

**28 Kalevala Day celebration**, 3 p.m, CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St. $10 for members; $14 for non-members. Children half price. Family maximum of $30 for members and $40 for non-members. 860-633-8402 or ctaudubon.org. GL

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# News roundup

## Thinking about spring and gardens

The Glastonbury Parks and Recreation Department will accept new registrations for community garden plots February 16. The plots, which measure 20 feet by 40 feet or 20 feet by 20 feet, are behind the police station and easily accessed from Canione Road. Access to water is also available. The plots are available to Glastonbury residents only and can be leased for $30 and $15 respectively. Proof of residency is required. Due to space limitations, residents may sign up for one plot only. The recreation office is at the rear of 2143 Main St. and is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. To learn more, call the department at 652-7679.

## Glastonbury, East Hartford chambers merge

The Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce has merged with the chamber in East Hartford, creating a new chamber known as the Connecticut River Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Local chamber events such as the Apple Harvest Festival and the summertime music festival will continue, as will the traditional events sponsored by the East Hartford chamber.

Mary Ellen Dombrowski, who has been president of the local chamber for many years and has been the interim director of the East Hartford chamber for the past year, will lead the new group. The Glastonbury chamber has about 500 members, while the East Hartford chamber has about 130.

Offices will remain open in both towns.

"We are energetically looking forward to uniting the Glastonbury and East Hartford Chambers as the CT River Valley Chamber of Commerce," Dombrowski said.

## School board approves budget

The board of education has approved a $102.1 million spending plan for the 2016-2017 budget year.

The proposal, presented by Superintendent Alan Bookman is 2.89 percent higher than this year's budget. That increase is one of the lowest proposed increases in the past several years. In presenting the budget to the board, Bookman said most of the increase is the result of negotiated salaries, which account for 1.72 percent of the increase, along with costs for special education, technology and maintaining buildings.

The proposal calls for nine fewer full-time employees, three at the elementary school level and six at Gideon Welles, for a reduction of $630,000.

Last year the school board cut more than $700,000 from Bookman's proposal; this year no cuts were made.

Bookman said his top priority is capital improvements, including air-conditioning for the schools that will remain open after any possible consolidation. Other capital improvement proposals are additional locker rooms, a weight room and replacement of the turf field at Glastonbury High School, new boilers at Gideon Welles School, and new lockers at three elementary schools.

## Roundabout coming this spring

Work on a 110-foot-wide roundabout at the intersection of Hebron Avenue and New London Turnpike is scheduled to start in June.

Last year the town council approved a $1.5 million plan for the intersection, which is known for traffic congestion and accidents. The roundabout will be 10 feet wider than originally planned so it can accommodate larger vehicles. The work is expected to be completed this fall.

A second roundabout is planned for the intersection of Hebron Avenue and House Street, also known for congestion and accidents. Town officials expect to receive state and federal grant money for improvements to the two intersections.

## Skating on thin ice

J.B. Williams and Eastbury ponds are available for unsupervised ice skating until dusk if conditions permit and the ice is at least 6 inches thick. At Eastbury, an area will be set aside for drop-in unsupervised ice hockey as well. Skating at Riverfront Park is available until 9 p.m. Ice must be at least 6 inches thick. To confirm whether skating is available, call the recreation department at 860-652-7689. **GL**

Photos courtesy of the Historical Society of Glastonbury

# A cool business

## Ice on local ponds used year-round for refrigeration

**by Nancy Thompson**
*Editor*

People of all ages enjoy the town's frozen ponds for skating, hockey and ice-fishing, but many of those ponds had a very practical use as well until about 75 years ago.

That's when electric refrigerators, fixtures in today's homes, replaced the ice boxes that had been around for centuries and eliminated the need to saw blocks of ice from lakes and ponds.

Throughout the northern United States and in countries such as Norway and Denmark, ice-harvesting was an international business using special tools and a global network of ice houses. It was worth an estimated $220 million in today's dollars by the end of the 19th century.

The local ponds, many of which were left behind by glaciers as they retreated about 15,000 years ago, were too small for such large-scale industry, but they provided blocks of ice used by local families and farmers to preserve food year-round.

Much of the ice was harvested by local men who stored it in ice houses on or near their property. They insulated it with sawdust and pulled it out throughout the year to cool their products and their family's food.

For some, it was a modest business.

David Hollister was one local ice man. He's said to have taken ice from the South Glastonbury reservoir, a pond near Evergreen Lane. John Scaglia took over Hollister's business and delivered ice as far away as North Glastonbury. Farmers on Matson Hill cut ice from Pray's Pond on Belltown Hill Road, Smut Pond, and small ponds on their properties.

Employees of the Hockanum Ice Company, headquartered in Naubuc Avenue, delivered ice to local homes using a 1926 REO Speed Wagon truck from 1919 until 1948, when electric refrigerators became common and the need for blocks of ice evaporated.

Whether for commercial or personal use, harvesting ice was cold, hard work, often done at night when the ice was thickest. The ice surface needed to be at least two feet deep to accommodate large horse-drawn equipment, although men were able to use hand tools on shallower ice and smaller ponds.

Typically, men would work in pairs as they cut along parallel lines using large, two-handles saws specially designed to cut ice. Once the long rectangle of ice floated free they used long-handled tools to break the blocks crosswise. They used poles to steer the cakes of ice into a channel leading to the ice house, where it would be covered with sawdust and stored for months.

A Glastonbury man was responsible for creating a new and improved way to cut great blocks of ice from ponds' surface. Robert Moseley received a patent in 1874 for his "new and useful improvements" in ice-cutting machines.

"The nature of this invention consists in simplifying the mechanism of an ice-butting machine so as to be cheap of manufacture, easy and effectual in its operation by one or two men while standing upon the machine," Moseley said in his patent application, which went on to describe the various parts and how they would work.

"By the use of this machine the work of cutting ice is more rapidly performed, and the labor rendered pleasant instead of irksome, as in the old way," Moseley said in conclusion.

A photograph of Moseley's ice cutter being used by three men was chosen for the cover of "Images of America: Glastonbury," by Robert Hubbard and the Historical Society of Glastonbury.

The electric refrigerator, first sold in Chicago in 1913 and common throughout the country by the late 1940s, ended the need to harvest ice, although it is still done for ice festivals throughout colder climates. **GL**

**Left:** Glastonbury resident Robert Moseley's ice machine made it easier to carve ice from bodies of water in the late 1800s.

**Top right:** The Historical Society of Glastonbury has several ice-cutting tools, including these, stores on the grounds of the Welles-Shipman-Ward House.

**Bottom right:** Hockanum Ice Company delivered ice to area residents with this 1926 REO Speed Wagon until 1948, when electric refrigerators were becoming common and the need for ice harvesting was vanishing.

Courtesy photo

# To Russia, with love

## Local students exchange art and culture with teens in Russia

**Emily Geaslin created this picture of students playing the flute. It has been sent to Glastonbury High School's companion school in St. Petersburg, Russia**

**by Nancy Thompson**
*Editor*

They probably won't meet in person for a couple of years, but students in Glastonbury High School's third-year Russian class are about to have their first face-to-face encounter with students at the School for Global Education in St. Petersburg.

The meeting, scheduled to take place during a video conference in March, will give students in both countries a chance to talk about their communities and the artwork they have created and sent to their counterparts.

The program is part of ArtLink and sponsored by Creative Connections, an international cultural education organization based in Norwalk. This is the fifth year local Russian students have taken part in ArtLink, which, as its name suggests, encourages students to make connections through art.

"This year's theme was 'My community, my point of view,'" said Jan Eklund, who has been teaching Russian here for 28 years. "It's all about values and what's important."

The project starts with a discussion about values and a visit to Creative Connections' online book of art. "We do as much of it as we can in Russian," Eklund said. "We

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# EDUCATION

write ideas in Russian and English."

Students then create pictures in a variety of media with the help of Cynthia Parsons, the school system's director of art.

She helps the kids with the hands-on work, with perspective, color and media," Eklund said. "It's good to have an artist's point of view."

Parsons, in her second year as art director, said she enjoys helping with the project.

"It's a great opportunity to work with kids that age," she said. "They have all different abilities. Some hadn't had art at the high school level."

Using Creative Connections as an intermediary, students at both schools send their artwork to their counterparts.

"We look at the Russian art, analyze it, talk about what they are trying to tell us, and hang it in our classroom," she said. Several thousand miles away, students in St. Petersburg do the same with the pictures they've gotten from the students here.

The local students, all freshmen, said they like the program for a variety of reasons.

Matt Convard said he enjoyed expressing how he feels about his community and his country, while Will Zeppieri liked using different media to portray his community and Ali Brady enjoyed sitting and painting during class, something she hadn't done since elementary school.

Rachel Sparks, Brianna Fonda and Shannon Kiniry said they liked sharing their culture and their town.

"I enjoyed thinking about what is big and important in our culture," Rachel said. "We don't really think about it because we do those things every day so we don't think that other cultures may not do similar things, which is cool."

"I liked that we tried to represent our culture to give kids in Russia a taste of America," Brianna said. "It was really cool to see everything my classmates valued in the Glastonbury community and I think everyone did a really good job."

"I really enjoyed being allowed to express myself and my town through my personal favorite activities," Shannon said. "In doing this, I feel that the Russian students not only learned something about Glastonbury, but they learned something personal about myself as well."

Courtesy photo

**Students in Glastonbury High School's Russian 3 class show off their art before sending it to their companion school in Russia. In the front row are Brianna Fonda, Rachel Sparks, Eric Grin, Alison Brady and Isabelle Ureta, and in the back row are Julian Newquist, Shannon Kiniry, Emily Geaslin, Grace Breen, Matthew Convard and Will Zeppieri.**

The project culminates with a video conference next month. It's the first chance the students will have to see the people with whom they will exchange visits later in high school. It's fun for the students and the teachers, too.

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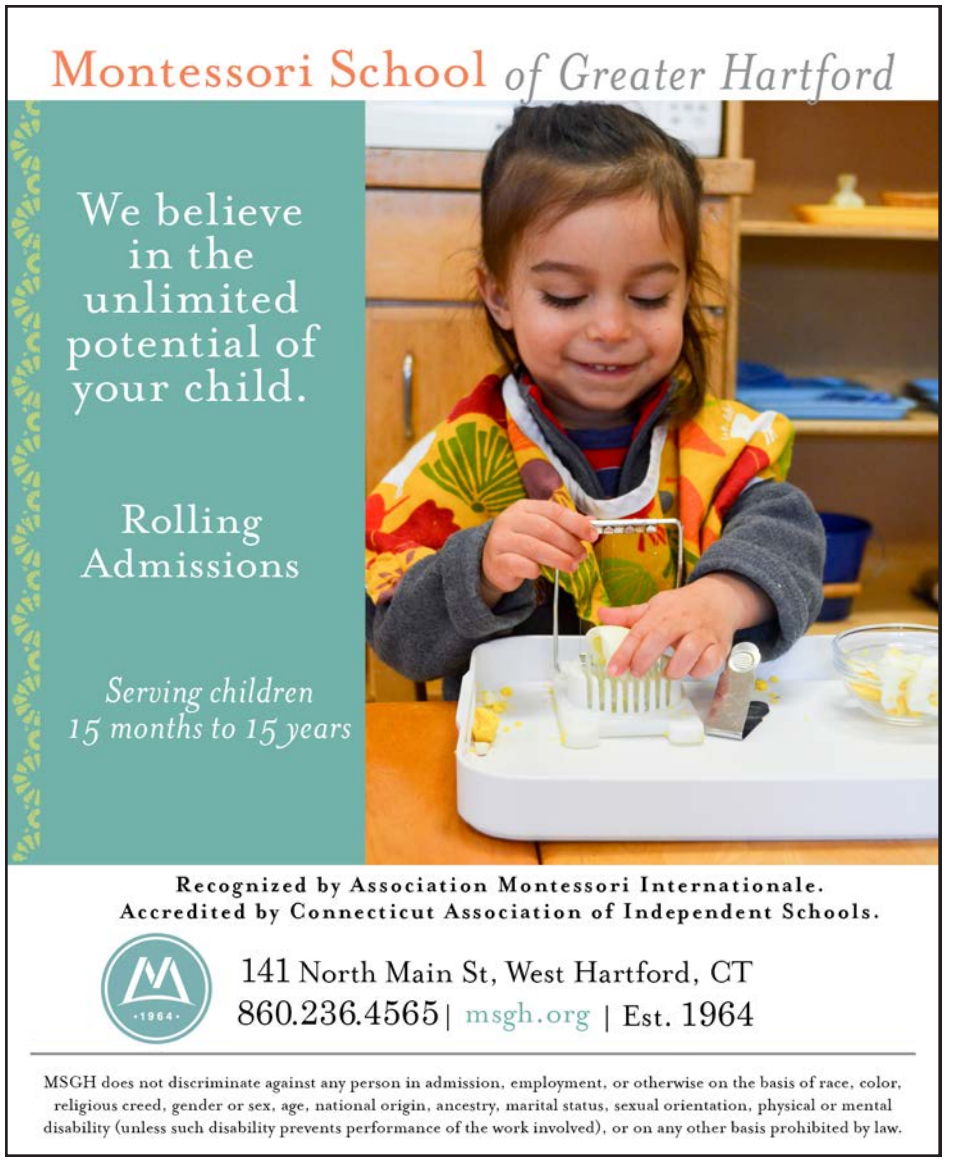
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# EDUCATION

**Isabelle Ureta drew this picture of a family enjoying fireworks. It has been sent to Glastonbury High School's companion school in St. Petersburg, Russia.**

"I really liked it last year when I got to go to the Skype section," Parsons said. "It was exciting for the kids to realize their pictures had gone to Russia. I think it's a great program."

"It's really nice for us," Eklund said. "It gives the ninth-graders a peek at the school they'll host and visit."

Rita Oleksak, the district's director of foreign languages, agreed. "You should see the looks on the children's faces," she said. "It's usually their first face-to-face encounter. This year our students are sharing history and culture in Glastonbury, events like the Apple Harvest Festival, which is nothing kids in St. Petersburg are familiar with."

The local students said they're looking forward to the upcoming Skype session.

Eric Grin said he wants to see what the Russian students thought about the local class's pictures, while Emily Geaslin is looking forward to meeting people from different backgrounds and comparing similarities and differences. Julian Newquist is eager to use his Russian skills to talk with the students in St. Petersburg.

Grace Breen wants to learn about the Russian students' pictures. "I am looking forward to seeing what the Russians think of our pictures, and to seeing what they drew and how their drawings relate to their culture," she said.

Local schools have been teaching Russian since 1959 and students have been participating in exchange programs since 1988, when Glastonbury High School was one of the first schools in the country to conduct exchanges with Russia and the former Soviet Union. Glastonbury High School and the School for Global Education have been partners since 2007.

The exchanges have evolved over the years, and with projects such as ArtLink and the connections the students make through social media they are very different than they were in the beginning.

"It's a drastic difference," Oleksak said about the moment the students arrive in their host country and meet their counterparts. "Once they're paired up they start their own online communications. They know who they're looking for and feel like they know each other." **GL**

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Community Sign Language Program

Adult Sign Language Class Schedule — Class Fee $250

- Spring Session 2016: March 1st to May 3rd
- Spring Sessions: meet once a week (Tuesday or Wednesday) for 10 weeks (4:30 to 6:30 PM. OR 6:00 to 8:00 PM.)
- For Tuesday evenings, we offer Level I, Level II and Level III classes.
- For Wednesday evenings, we offer Level I and Level II classes.

Youth Sign Language Class Schedule — Class Fee $175

- Spring 2016 Session: March 1st to April 26th
- Spring Sessions meet once a week on Tuesdays for 8 weeks.
- Tuesdays from 4:00 to 5:30 PM, we offer Level I & Level II classes.

Baby Sign Language Class Schedule — Class Fee (1 ADULT/1 BABY) $95 (ADDL. ADULT $10)

- Spring 2016 Session: March 12th, 19th & 26th
- Class meets once a week for 3 weeks
- Saturday mornings from 9:30 to 11:00 AM

Minimum of 12 students required to run class.
Class is subject to cancellation due to insufficient enrollment.
Registration & Payment Deadline: MUST REGISTER/PAY 2 weeks prior to class start date.

Register online!
www.asd-1817.org; OUTREACH SERVICES; SIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES
For further information: Phone: 860-570-1826 or email: asl@asd-1817.org

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# LIFE *student of the month*

Mikayla Nedder is a recognized leader and role model, and she's only in fifth grade.

As president of the Nayaug Elementary School's student council, she facilitates monthly meetings and events such as the school's spring beautification project, plans the schedule for the school store, delivers special morning announcements, and leads council activities such as winter coat drives and the collection of supplies for a local animal shelter.

She's a peer role model in the school's Unified Sports program, works with students with special needs during weekly lunch sessions and is a peer mentor for children in second grade.

Her teachers have described her as committed, compassionate, driven, and a pleasure to work with. They said she wants to put forth her best effort, is willing to take on a challenge and is a pleasure to work with.

Her friends have described her as athletic, outgoing, optimistic and "more than kind."

She said she wanted to be student council president because she wanted to be involved in school related events and help make the school the best it can be. Her favorite subject is math because she enjoys the challenge of solving difficult problems.

When not in school, Mikayla enjoys playing basketball, hip-hop music, playing the flute and hanging out with the goats and horses on her family's farm. Her twin sister, Katie, attends Nayaug as well. **GL**

Courtesy photo

Mikayla Nedder

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# *February Events*

**Interviewing Tips Workshop.** 2/2, 2 p.m. and 2/3, 12 noon, SSC L107. Learn the various stages of the interviewing process. Job seekers will gain insight into frequently asked interview questions and other tips that can help lead to a successful interview. Info: Julie Greene at 860-512-3372 or email jgreene@manchestercc.edu.

**Health Careers Admission Information Sessions:** Students interested in being admitted into a Health Careers credit program must attend a mandatory information session before applying. Info: Theresa Blake at 860-512-2704 or email tblake@manchestercc.edu.

**Respiratory Care.** 2/17, 9:30 a.m., LRC A226
**Radiologic Science.** 2/17, 12 noon, LRC A226
**Dental Assistant.** 2/17, 1 p.m., LRC A226
**Occupational Therapy Assistant.** 2/17, 2 p.m., LRC A226

For information regarding the non-credit program information sessions listed below, please contact Diane Mitchell at 860-512-2826 or email dmitchell@manchestercc.edu.

**Pharmacy Technician.** 2/3, 6 p.m., LRC B144
**Certified Nurse Aid (CNA).** 2/4, 6 p.m., LRC B125
**Phlebotomy Technician.** 2/4, 6 p.m., LRC B144

**Job Search and Cover Letters Workshop.** 2/9, 2 p.m., and 2/10, 12 noon, SSC L107. Identify strategies and techniques for managing a comprehensive and effective job search and maximize the impact of a cover letter. Info: Julie Greene at 860-512-3372 or email jgreene@manchestercc.edu.

**MCC Foundation "Hall of Fame" Valentine's Day Brunch.** 2/14, 11:30 a.m., A Villa Louisa, Bolton, CT. Join us in honoring our 2016 Hall of Fame awardees: Dr. and Mrs. Robert Fish - Investors of the Year, - and two volunteers of the year - Elizabeth (Betsy) Treiber and Gary Lavigne, Esq. Cost: $10 per person; reservations at weblink.donorperfect.com/MCCHallOfFame. Info: Diana Reid at 860-512-2909 or email dreid@manchestercc.edu.

**Making Effective Career Choices Workshop.** 2/16, 2 p.m., and 2/17, 12 noon, SSC L107. Learn how to make effective career choices through the use of traditional and online career-guidance assessment tools. Match your interests and personality types with career fields and traditional position titles, identify typical educational paths that one can take to become qualified for specific positions, and learn about available online resources that can assist you in your research process. Info: Julie Greene at 860-512-3372 or email jgreene@manchestercc.edu.

**The Common Read Book Discussion: "*The Beach*" by Alex Garland.** 2/19, 12:30 p.m., and 2/26, 12:30 p.m., LRC A121, Library. Please join us for great discussion and good company while exploring a captivating read, *The Beach*, by Alex Garland. Info: Rosalyn Wormack at 860-512-2618 or email rwormack@manchestercc.edu.

**International Film Series: *Paulette*** (France). 2/19, 7 p.m., SBM Charitable Foundation Auditorium. Retiree Paulette discovers a surprising way to supplement her meager pension - an unlikely but successful career selling cannabis. 87 mins. Comedy. French. Rated R. Info: Evelyn Angry-Smith at 860-512-2874, email eangry-smith@manchestercc.edu or visit libguides.manchestercc.edu/mccifs.

**Effective Resume Writing Workshop.** 2/23, 2 p.m., and 2/24, 12 noon, SSC L107. Improve your visibility in the job market. This workshop will provide information on the skills and strategies needed to develop a resume that gets positive response from employers. Info: Julie Greene at 860-512-3372 or email jgreene@manchestercc.edu.

*All events are free and open to the public, unless otherwise noted, and are subject to change without notice. For current information or notices of cancellation, click on "View All Events" on MCC's web site: www.manchestercc.edu.*

*2/2016*

Courtesy photo

Photo by Mara Dresner

**Artist Kelly Mehiel has a studio in her basement (right), where she works on clay creations, such as this sculpture (left) entitled "Interconnected."**

# 'I see art in everything'

## Kelly Mehiel is multi-dimensional artist

**by Mara Dresner**
*Staff Writer*

Kelly Mehiel is equally at home with a camera, paintbrush or lump of clay. While she's been interested in art ever since getting her first easel as a two-year-old, it wasn't her original career choice.

"I was planning on becoming a chef," said Mehiel, who was wait-listed at the Culinary Institute of America. "Then I had a knee injury. You have to stand 16 to 18 hours a day; it's very arduous. So I went back to my second love, which was acting."

She earned her BA in theater from Long Island University, although she didn't pursue it full time.

"I knew I couldn't make a living at acting," said Mehiel, who has done background work for film and television projects. "I never obviously got a break. I mostly just stuck to community theater. When I had children, that fit in my schedule. I had a lot of fun, great roles."

Some of her favorites include Susy in "Wait Until Dark," Laura in "The Solid Gold Cadillac" and Tracy in "The Philadelphia Story."

Still, Mehiel, who was born in Virginia, and had also lived in Maryland, Kansas and New York by the time she was 15, never fully gave up her art work.

About a decade ago, she began turning back to painting and ceramics more seriously, eventually enrolling as a student at Manchester Community College, where she is completing a degree in visual arts in May.

"I [didn't] want my art to be just a hobby anymore. I wanted to get into it and really do it and follow it, so I did," said Mehiel, who is also acting again, appearing in a holiday show at Seven Angels Theatre in Waterbury. "I knew I couldn't devote the time and didn't have the financial wherewithal to do a four-year college. I wasn't even sure I could get into a four-year college. MCC has a fantastic arts program. They have a really amazing program. I would put it up against any program.

"Kelly was a student of mine for Drawing I a few years back," said Patricia M. Carrigan, associate professor of visual fine arts, Manchester Community College. "She is very dedicated to the arts and committed to making [it] work. I recall her tenacity in never giving up even though she was drawing something that wasn't her favorite subject, a still-life set-up in Drawing I. She stayed with it and completed it. She was also working in particular on some areas of texture in the drawing and was especially versed at describing areas of value and texture. She was drawn to this in her work. I can see why she became so interested in working with clay. Kelly works very hard never giving up no matter what the challenge is. She was also a very positive member of the arts community at MCC, helping out with anything anyone ever needed and always assisting faculty and students alike. She was a natural leader in the studio courses and always brought out the best in fellow students. Kelly builds community wherever she is and is a dedicated and talented artist."

Her earliest training came from her mother, who taught her how to do needlepoint, collage and drawing. From there, she moved into painting, photography and ceramics.

"I've always dabbled in painting on my own, photography on my own, first in film in the darkroom and then, digital," said Mehiel, who has been specializing in ceramics at MCC. "I just love working with the material and watching where the clay wants to go and what journey is it going to take me on, and the glaze; is it going to work? It's so much fun to see it evolve and go on the journey with the material. I love wheel work and started doing sculpture this past year, which is just so much fun."

She still does quite a bit of photography work, especially nature scenes, such as flowers, birds or sunsets.

She also paints, mostly abstracts, working in both oils and acrylics.

"I just put paint on the canvas and have fun with the play of it," she said.

When she's not doing abstract work, she returns to nature for inspiration.

"I love doing trees, and again, sunrises," said Mehiel, who is a volunteer at the Audubon Society in Glastonbury.

Her love of nature dates back to childhood.

"My mom is very into nature too;

she loves the ocean and the forest. We had a state park near where we lived in Virginia. She loved to go for walks in there. Every time we did, she pointed out the play on the light on the leaves. She was always very in tune, she was very one with nature. She really instilled that in me. I still enjoy going for walks and paying attention to the light and the birds. I did the same with my kids from the time they were tiny," said Mehiel, who has been a vendor at the Glastonbury Farmers Market for the past two years. She is also one of a large group of artists who contribute art for Art for Aids, a fundraiser held late spring, each year in Hartford.

She works out of a studio space in her basement, although she has a long-term dream.

"My goal is eventually I would love to have a space where I can have other artists come in and work," said Mehiel, who also works for her father's company, Four M Corporation, doing "managerial oversight stuff" from her home.

"It's all out of the house, so I can set my own hours. I can devote whatever time I need to painting or ceramics or going out and driving around, taking photographs. It allows me a lot of freedom. You need a lot of time to sit and create. It takes 40 minutes to set up, then you want to devote at least two hours to actually working and then it takes another hour to clean up," she said. "Now I have a real studio, I'm hoping to get into a routine. I would like to work for some time in the studio, take a break for lunch, do some of my other work, then go back and do some more. I would like to be serious [about it] and not just where I can fit it in. Really, it's so much fun, when you're doing something creative and something you love, it's the best way to spend your day."

She said that she doesn't always know ahead of time what type of projects she'll be working on in a given day.

"It's whatever's tickling me. It's a creative process. Some days I wake up and I've got to have my paints. I don't need coffee, just my paints. Some days, I need my clay," she said. "Photography is more technical. Taking the photographs is fun. I always have my camera with me. [Working on them is] very technical. I have to gear myself up for it. It's very draining. When I worked in a darkroom, it was so much more fun. I was surrounded by the medium. I usually wait until the afternoon to do that when I'm more awake."

Mehiel offers her work, including notecards, ceramic pieces, photographs and paintings, under her company name, Blinking Owl.

"The name I was going to have was 'Winking Owl,' but that name was already taken, so I switched it to 'Blinking Owl.' I wanted something playful. The name just sounds playful to me. It makes you wonder what's this about," she said. "I always had affinity for owls. For me, they represent creativity, curiosity and wisdom."

She has a Facebook page where she posts new offerings depending on the day of the week. On Mondays, that might include things to do on the weekend. Tuesdays are for books and movies. Wednesdays are all about do-it-yourself projects. On Thursdays, you'll find a poem or quotation, and on Fridays, Mehiel posts a recipe.

"It's just my way of sort of giving people a little nudge in a creative direction," she said.

Despite her hectic schedule, Mehiel is always rooted in her art.

"It's such an integral part of me. I feel without art I wouldn't have breath," she said. "It inspires me, it drives me. I see art in everything." **GL**

*Learn more at blinkingowlart.com*

Courtesy photos

**Much of Kelly Mehiel's work is inspired by nature such as these plates (above), which she calls "Springtime Pattern." She also enjoys photographing nature (below), such as the peonies in "Pink Profusion."**

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# Slice of LIFE

photos by Brian Ambrose

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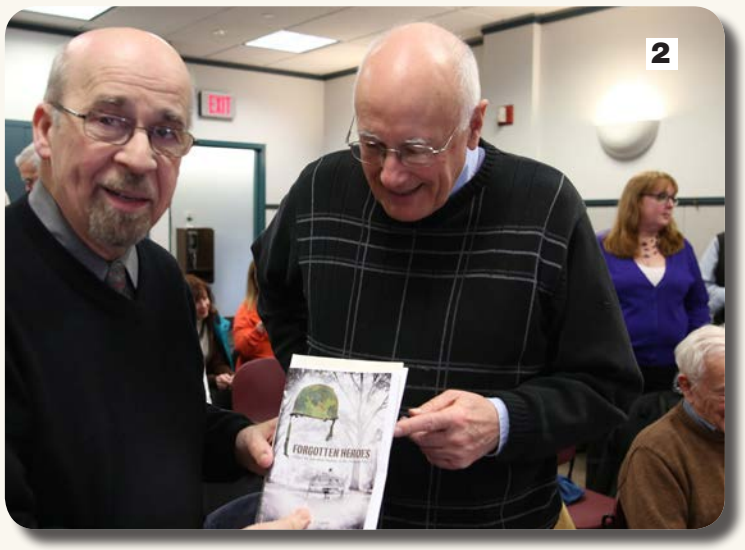

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## Poetry Here and Now

Local poets and others gathered at the Welles-Turner Memorial Library for "Poetry Here and Now," an afternoon of poetry, music and open mike performances and one of the town's poet laureate programs. **1.** Paul Weisser, a member of the Three Magneatos, tunes up in anticipation of a fun afternoon. **2.** Michael Lepore and Dick Allen talk about Lepore's book, Forgotten Heroes, which is about the Vietnam War's effects on those who fought and their families. **3.** Susan Nedd, Lilly Luby, 9, and her mom Marie Luby were part of the audience. **4.** Lilly Luby, 9, was one of the youngest to deliver her poems during the open mike part of the program. **5.** Kathleen Housley has written nine books, including a biography of Glastonbury's Smith sisters. **6.** Andrea Barton is a mother and a teacher as well as a poet. **7.** Rocket Ron Dayton, bass player for the Three Magneatos, plays one of his favorites. **8.** Mark Sheridan has been writing poetry for three years. **9.** Will Cox delivers one of his favorite poems. **10.** Suzanne Neidzielska shares one of her favorite poems. **11.** Julie Sharon and her mother, Melanie, enjoy the program. **12.** Jimmy Walz of the Three Magneatos keeps the beat. **13.** Monica Shea enjoys the afternoon.

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# Events spotlight

## Our Natural World: Photography Exhibit & Sale

Tuesday through Saturday
February 2 through 27, 1 to 5 p.m.
*CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St.*
*860-633-8402*

This annual wintertime event will feature an exhibit with more than 250 entries with photos of plants, birds, butterflies and bugs, other animals, landscapes, nature's miracles and people in relationship with nature. Visitors will be able to buy one or more of the framed photos. A $3 donation is requested.

## Romancing the Stars

February 13, 7:30 and 9 p.m.
*Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium, 95 Oak St. Planetarium@Glastonburyus.org or 860-652-4910, ext. 364*

The staff of the Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School planetarium will provide an opportunity for a romantic, out-of-this-world evening under the stars this Valentine's Day weekend. "Romancing the Stars," a planetarium show about some of the many love stories told in the night sky, will be shown twice. Tickets cost $4.25 and are available only through www.glastonburyplanetarium.org.

## Kids' book sale

February 20, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
*Welles Turner Memorial Library Friends Room, 2407 Main St. 860-652-7728 or wtmlib.com*

This popular event will feature 40 boxes of books in excellent condition, as well as compact discs and DVDs. Unless marked otherwise, hardcover books are one dollar and paperback books are 50 cents. Patrons should bring their own bags.

## Owl weekend

Owl prowl, February 5, 7 p.m.
SuperbOWL, February 7, 2 p.m.
*CT Audubon Society Center, 1361 Main St., 860-633-8402*

The weekend of February 5 will be an "owling" good time at the CT Audubon Society Center. Friday evening at 7 p.m. the center will sponsor an owl prowl at Earle Park with teacher/naturalist Kasha Breau. Participants should bring a flashlight and dress warmly. After the walk, cocoa, coffee and tea will be served. Pre-registration is preferred. There's a charge of $8 for members and $10 for non-members, half price for children younger than 12.

Owl weekend

Courtesy of The Connecticut Audubon Society

On Sunday, while some are sitting in front of a television watching the super bowl, the center will host its annual SuperbOWL program featuring live owls and expertise from teacher/naturalist Kasha Breau and Mary Beth Kaeser from Horizon Wings. Participants will learn how owls see, hear and hunt for prey in winter, learn their songs, and visit with live owls before enjoying an "owl pellet" snack afterward. Pre-registration is preferred. There's a charge of $8 for members and $10 for non-members, half price for children younger than 12. **GL**


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**Harold** is 12 years old, a domestic short hair mix. He's shy, but once comfortable with someone loves to sit on a lap and purr. He would do well in a home that does not have any other pets in it. Children are OK as long as they are gentle. His general demeanor is quiet and reserved.

*Inquiries about adoption may be made at the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Road, Newington. Call 860-594-4500. More information, including videos, can be found online at cthumane.org. Click on "Adopt" and "Newington." The Connecticut Humane Society is a private organization and has no time limits for adoption.*


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Marien Zanyk poses with her Willow Workout Freeform Exercise Device.

# Local woman creates a new way to work out

**by Mara Dresner**
*Staff Writer*

You're probably familiar with yoga and may know a little about Pilates. The next workout craze just might be the Willow Workout.

The Willow Workout Freeform Exercise Device is the brainchild of Marien J. Zanyk, a Canadian native with an athletic background.

"I currently run in the Connecticut forest, using circuit training and CrossFit combinations, using the trees, the rocks and the cliffs. I've also run half-marathons, triathlons. I'm a swimmer. I downhill ski hard, like a hot dog. I've done track and field, gymnastics, diving," said Zanyk, who has a doctorate in pathology and has worked in medical device sales, as well as an orthopedic specialist and physical therapist.

Zanyk used herself as a test subject while developing her device.

"I've been doing these intense workouts in the Connecticut forest for over eight years and for many years before that in Minnesota. I got Lyme disease in my left knee two summers ago and using this technique, I was able to restore to full function, from being on crutches to full function, in three short weeks; that's when I knew this could be done," she said.

"I engineered it, submitted it for U.S. and international patents, and have been working toward distribution of this product for two years," said Zanyk, whose company name is W2Designs, LLC.

There are two versions of the product. The standard model, which sells for $899, is made from a wood-like fiber-reinforced plastic. The custom model is manufactured in Nova Scotia by world-renowned shipwrights and sells for $1,600. It comes in a choice of light oak or cherry finishes. Each weighs about 40 pounds and Zanyk said it takes five minutes to set up.

She said the product's ease of use and many options are among its benefits.

"Willow Workout Freeform

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In addition to the device itself, there are accessories available for purchase, such as resistance tubing and a speed bag. Zanyk has a video workout and plans to offer additional workouts, some geared toward specific athletes, such as runners; others for upper body or lower body; and still others by diagnosis, such as knee injury or foot pain. She also offers personal training sessions in conjunction with the device.

She'd like to see the device used in a variety of settings.

"For personal trainers, we'll have a whole direction for them to improve their client interaction," she said. "For rehab-focused groups, therapists and program directors in senior facilities, even hotels will love the small footprint of this device. Many videos and thorough instruction will be coming soon."

Zanyk wanted the device to be attractive as well as functional.

The company has just started marketing the products, through trade shows and through direct purchase on her website.

Zanyk has big dreams.

"As our recognition expands, our sales are expected to penetrate homes, offices, gyms, clinics, studios and hotels within a global market," she said of the devices, which became available in September 2015.

Her first year sales goal is $1.1 million in net revenue or 1,000 units.

Her business was selected as a 2015 Tech Company to Watch by the Connecticut Technology Council. She also participated in the National Association of Professional Women Summit in New York City.

"It is a product whose time has come. The benefits of stretching not only in youngsters but seniors is being shown daily," said Joseph Waxman of West Hartford, vice chairman of the Hartford Chapter of Service Corps of Retired Executives, which has served as a mentor and advisor to Zanyk and her company.

Waxman said he was impressed by Zanyk's passion about the product and "how fit she was and knowledgeable about the human body and exercise benefits."

"It is not difficult to be caught up with Marien's enthusiasm and dedication to her product, and she has met with considerable response from those in the physical fitness business," said Sameek "Miki" Ray, a Wethersfield resident who is a partner in Guru Enterprises Group, a company that specializes in manufacturing, sales and marketing, business turnarounds and venture capital, and is a mentor at SCORE. "My company was hired by a Chinese company to help them develop trade between the U.S., China and India. They also own a company in China that specializes in fiber reinforced plastic and they said they could make Marien's product with it, which they have done and very well."

Zanyk has an advisory board of 19 members and consulted with a number of people while working on the design, including physical therapists, personal trainers and a variety of other fitness-related professionals.

Even with all the guidance, she said starting the company was a big step.

"As an entrepreneur and small business owner, and having stepped away from my previous career to advance this venture, it is difficult on family and finances," said Zanyk, who has lived in Connecticut for nine years with her husband, Alex, and four children, Julia, 21; Nicholas, 18; Noah, 14; and Leo, 11. "However, it's well worth everyone's investments, and my next goal is to achieve seed funding to propel this to the next level. I've self-funded for two years. It's better known as boot strapping and it is a ride-and-a-half. However, it's one that we've embraced whole-heartedly."

Zanyk will donate some of the proceeds from Willow Workout to the Warka Water project in Ethiopia, an environmentally, socially and financially sustainable solution to potable water.

"As we gain success, we can share our success. When you look to the world, it will delight in your offerings. This form of drought relief makes sense and like us, it's inspired by trees," Zanyk said. **GL**

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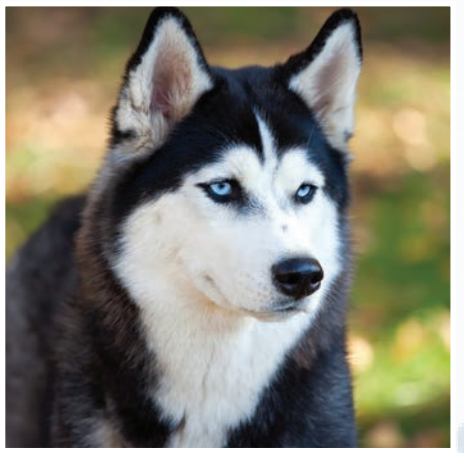

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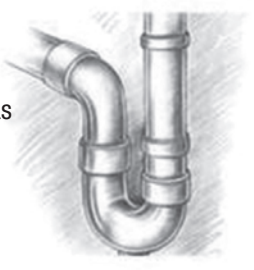

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# A Note from Nancy

## (Don't) Let it snow!

It's winter in New England.

It's supposed to be cold. It's supposed to snow.

That said, I remember last winter, which almost turned me into a snowbird.

Worse yet, I feel somewhat responsible.

A few years ago I got all Martha Stewart-y and decided to buy a variety of seasonal decorations to hang on our front door. We have silk flowers in the spring and summer, a jack-o-lantern in October, a cornucopia in November, greens in December, and what may have been the problem from January through March.

It's a grapevine wreath with a cute snowman holding a sign that says "Let it Snow!"

We've had one winter since then that wasn't horrible.

We've learned new terms, like "roof rakes" and "polar vortex". We've set lots of records, none of them good.

A couple of days after Christmas in 2010, with our new door sign in place, the first winter storm of the season hit, leaving 14 inches of snow. An early January blizzard left 30 inches in parts of the state, causing roofs to collapse just about everywhere and forcing the state to close part of I-95.

Later that month another blizzard dropped close to 20 inches of snow. It was the third snowiest winter on record.

We got a reprieve in 2011-2012, but with all the property damage and power outages that Halloween snowstorm caused, the next four months could have been sunny and 70 and it still would've made the record books.

Nobody can forget Superstorm Sandy in October of 2012, but do you remember that the first significant snowfall of the season came only nine days later? More snow fell at the end of December. A blizzard dumped more than two feet of snow in early February, and two more storms hit a couple of weeks later.

The winter of 2013-2014 wasn't much better, but last winter was in a class by itself, starting with a snowstorm the day before Thanksgiving and a Nor-Easter in early December.

The National Weather Service keeps track of this kind of information, and here's the list for the first few months of 2015:

**January 3:** light snow event
**January 6:** light snow event
**January 9:** snow squalls
**January 18:** ice storm
**January 24:** snow
**January 26:** blizzard

**February 2:** snow and ice storm
**February 9:** snow event
**February 14:** snow event
**February 21:** snow and ice event
**March 1:** snow event
**March 5:** snow event
**March 20:** snow event
**March 29:** snow event

And most of those happened when it was so cold that nothing melted. In fact, last February was the coldest month since the weather folks have been keeping records.

We had a glacier in our driveway with enough ice that getting the mail was dangerous. Our daughter, a physical therapist in an area hospital, started giving me daily reports about all the people in the critical care unit who'd been injured when they fell in their driveways. I wanted to chip it away but couldn't because our ice chipper was stuck in a foot of ice on our deck. And when we returned from our getaway to Florida in late March, not much had melted and more snow was on the way.

This year, when I removed the Christmas wreath and put the snowman on the door, I made a slight modification to the snowman's sign. I hope the weather gods notice.

*– Nancy Thompson*

glastonbury LIFE

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]

# An Impressive 365 Days!

Here are the highlights, records have been kept since 1905 for the Hartford Area... the location of measurement currently is Windsor Locks:

- The first quarter (January, February, and March) was the all-time coldest
- February was brutally cold with an average temperature of 16.1 degrees, making it the all-time coldest month; it was also the 3rd snowiest February with a total of 31.9 inches
- May was the warmest with an average temperature of 66.1 degrees (6.6 degrees warmer than normal)
- 18 days featured a temperature 90 degrees or higher (which is only 1 day above the annual average), the hottest temperature was 95 degrees on July 29th
- No tornadoes were reported in Connecticut, and there was no direct impact from any tropical system
- The autumn season (September, October, and November) tied for the 5th warmest on record
- The year was dry, in fact much of the state was classified in a 'moderate' drought with total precipitation at 39.21 inches, which is 6.64 inches below normal
- December goes down as the warmest with an average temperature of 43.3 degrees, an amazing 11.7 degrees above normal... more incredible: it was 4.7 degrees warmer than the previous record of 38.6 degrees in December of 1923!

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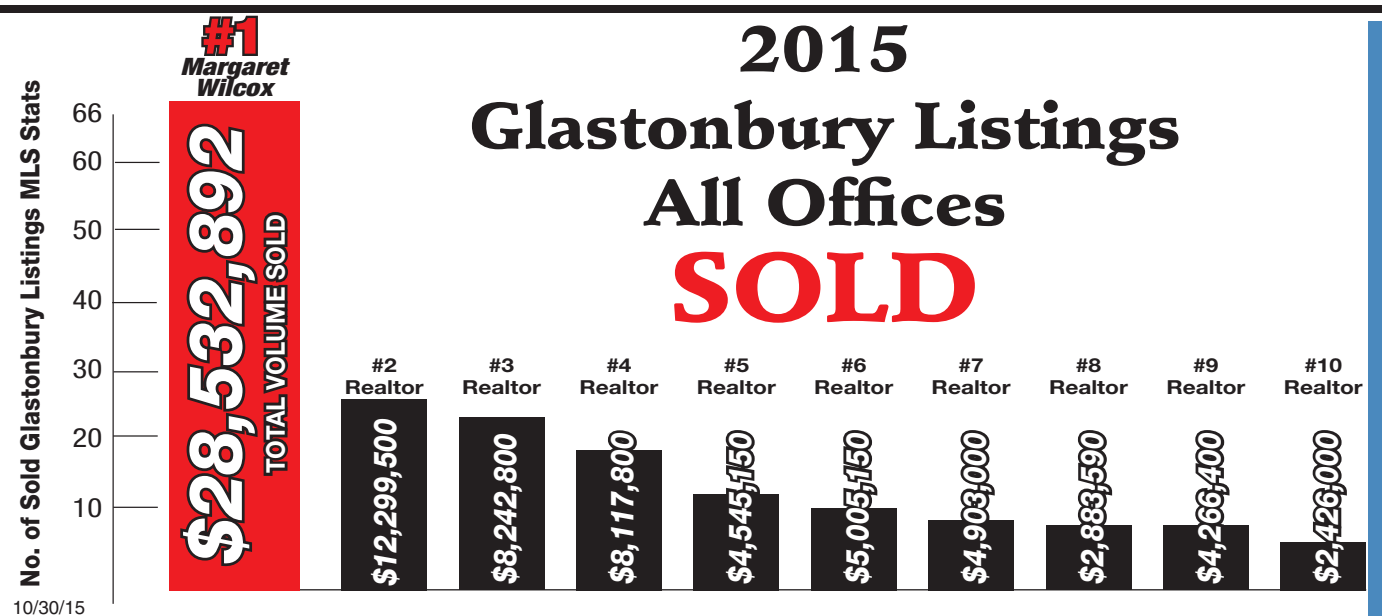

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| Glastonbury $925,000 | S Glastonbury $910,000 | Glastonbury $898,000 | S Glastonbury $810,000 | Glastonbury $699,900 | Glastonbury $699,667 |

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| Glastonbury $685,000 | S Glastonbury $662,500 | Glastonbury $635,900 | Glastonbury $609,900 | Glastonbury $417,000 | Glastonbury $399,900 | S Glastonbury $250,000 | Glastonbury $332,500 |

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| Glastonbury $485,000 | Glastonbury $279,900 | S Glastonbury $189,900 | Glastonbury $379,905 | Glastonbury $522,405 | S Glastonbury $745,000 | S Glastonbury $464,900 | Glastonbury $534,900 |

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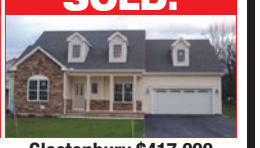
| | | | | | | |  |
| S Glastonbury $425,000 | Glastonbury $319,000 | Glastonbury $329,900 | Glastonbury $299,155 | Glastonbury $339,900 | Glastonbury $750,000 | Glastonbury $149,900 | Glastonbury $417,000 |

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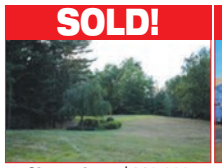
|  | | | | | | | | |
| Glastonbury $119,000 | S Glastonbury $569,900 | Glastonbury $319,900 | Glastonbury $236,550 | Glastonbury $299,900 | Glastonbury $299,900 | Glastonbury $324,900 | Glastonbury $205,900 | Glastonbury $538,000 |

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| S Glastonbury $474,900 | S Glastonbury $155,000 | Glastonbury $379,900 | Glastonbury $369,900 | Glastonbury $219,900 | S Glastonbury $569,900 | Glastonbury $339,900 | Glastonbury $489,500 | Glastonbury $579,000 |

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| Glastonbury $213,900 | Glastonbury $574,900 | Glastonbury $429,900 | Glastonbury $389,900 | Glastonbury $389,900 | S Glastonbury $569,900 | S Glastonbury $289,900 | Glastonbury $189,900 | Glastonbury $589,000 |

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